

Welcome to the new “Blythe Blast!”, providing you with City news direct from the source! It has been developed, in part, in response to the public’s request for more transparency in government and the City of Blythe certainly supports open and honest operations. The shenanigans that occurred in the City of Bell over a number of years have unfortunately cast a pall over all units of local government, however rest assured none of those transgressions are being committed in Blythe City government. The main reason we are even reading about them in the first place is because they are unique and isolated incidents.

This feature has also been developed simply to disseminate information regarding programs, projects, and actions of the City. It is not news to anyone that rumors run rampant in small towns such as ours and it will be in everyone’s best interest to know the facts. Our intent, therefore, is to “tell it like it is”, to quote a catch phrase of the 1960’s.

Rest assured that City employees are qualified, dedicated, and honest people and strive to do a good job. If you hear or read something that sounds odd to you, it probably is and is therefore more than likely just a rumor. Feel free to contact City Hall with any questions you may have about any subject with which the City deals.

This feature will be updated periodically as circumstances dictate. Please come back regularly and see what’s new!

June 21, 2013

CLARIFYING PARK USE PERMITS AND INSURANCE REQUIREMENTS

There appears to be some confusion surrounding the City’s park use permits and insurance requirements. Section 12.28 of the Blythe Municipal Code (revised 2007) spells out the conditions under which park use permits are issued. Casual, daily use of the parks for any purpose, including birthday parties and family picnics, do not require permits nor do they require insurance. The City typically does not even know about such uses nor does it care to track or regulate them. As a matter of practice, permits and insurance are only required (with one exception) for large gatherings for non-City sponsored events such as political rallies, those utilizing sound amplification, concerts, sporting events, etc. In these cases the City needs to know about the events so that resources such as police and fire can be alerted should the need for such services be required. The exception is the use of bounce houses which have been known to be high risk entertainment. We live in a litigious society and the City must be protected from claims made by those who may be injured in a bounce house. The taxpayers of the City of Blythe should not be on the hook for paying legal fees to fight, or extricate itself from, lawsuits stemming from risky activities with which it had no involvement. It would make the most sense for owners/operators of these commercial structures to obtain insurance naming the City as additional insured in their normal course of business, just as any other business offering a service does. The cost would simply be added to the rental cost and, spread out over the large number of rentals, the cost to the end user should be minimal. Again, casual use of parks for birthdays, picnics, and general use require neither a permit nor insurance.

June 14, 2013

FISCAL YEAR 2013-2014 BUDGET PASSED BY CITY COUNCIL

Through a unanimous vote (with Mayor Oscar Galvan absent) of the City Council during the regular City Council meeting of June 13, 2013, the City's fiscal year 2013-2014 proposed budget was adopted by the City Council. Taking effect July 1, the \$25.1 million spending plan, with approximately \$9.5 million of that amount being in the General Fund, represents the fifth, consecutive budget presented by staff that is balanced and realistic. Each of those five budgets has gotten progressively stronger and the budget approved by the City Council last evening includes the following:

- Two new positions in Public Works, one in the Streets Division and one in Parks
- 4 new police cruisers (bringing the total number of new police vehicles purchased over the past three years to 9)
- Retention of a part time Building Inspector position
- Increase in the City Attorney's compensation
- Funding for November's general election
- Funding for benefits for new council members (dependent upon election results)
- Funding for benefits for new City Clerk and City Treasurer (also dependent upon election results)
- A Contingency ("Rainy Day") Fund of \$55,000 – the largest in many years
- The balancing of both the Sewer and Water Funds for the first time in many years
- Continued funding for the Recreation Center
- Continued funding of the "City Promotion" line item

TODAY IS FLAG DAY

Don't forget to honor Old Glory throughout the day.

BELL LANE OVERLAY COMPLETED

The asphalt grind and overlay project (scroll down for earlier articles on this subject) has been completed. The contractor did an outstanding job and it looks spectacular! During last evening's City Council meeting, a Bell Lane homeowner thanked the Council for the new road and added that it was nice to see news of the project being advertised on the City's electronic message sign.

June 12, 2013

CITY WELCOMES NEW FINANCE DIRECTOR.

At a special meeting held on May 21, 2013 the City Council approved an employment contract with Mr. Frank Luckino to fill the position of Finance Director. During the meeting, City Manager Lane stated that Mr. Luckino went through an in-depth interview process which included a written exam and was the number one choice. Frank has numerous years of financial experience and comes to us from the Hi-Desert Water District in Yucca Valley where he served as the Chief Financial Officer. Frank began work on June 10, 2013 and the City welcomes its newest addition.

June 7, 2013

DOLLAR GENERAL STORE GOES VERTICAL!

Construction progress on the new Dollar General store, at the corner of Hobsonway and 9th Street, is moving very swiftly. Today the first wall was stood up, a process known as “going vertical”. Watch the project move even more quickly now that it is at this stage.



June 7, 2013: The first wall of the new Dollar General store erected today!

CITY PUBLIC WORKS CREWS HANDLE MAJOR WATER LEAK

This past Tuesday night beginning at around 9:30 p.m., City Public Works crews responded to a complaint of water seeping up through the asphalt on Rice Street between Jack-In-the-Box and the Mobil gas station. What they found upon arrival, however, was a huge leak that undermined the street, the sidewalk and alley on the north side of Rice Street. The massive leak was in an old, unmapped 6” pipe. Water was shut off to all the businesses on the east side of Lovekin from the freeway north to Hobsonway as well as two establishments on Hobsonway. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that the shutoff valve that would have enabled workers to isolate the break had mysteriously been cut off and covered with concrete, thereby rendering it completely inoperable. If only the infrastructure could talk and tell why that had been done all those many years ago! Crews worked throughout the night and all day Wednesday to fix the problem and now attention turns to repairing the street and sidewalk. Nice job, guys!



June 5, 2013: City Public Works crews work overtime to fix a massive water leak on Rice St.

June 6, 2013

BELL LANE PROJECT NEARLY COMPLETED

With seemingly-lightning speed, Granite Construction has just about finished the grind and overlay project on Bell Lane. The paving was completed late yesterday and the only thing left to do is the process known in the industry as “raising iron”. This entails jackhammering out circles around manhole covers and other infrastructure access points and pouring concrete collars around them. It can often be a shock to residents when they see crews taking a jackhammer to brand new asphalt but not to worry, raising iron is typically the reason for it.



June 6, 2013: Completed handicap ramps and new asphalt on Bell Lane

June 4, 2013

CONSTRUCTION PROGRESS

The Bell Lane grind and overlay project is moving swiftly (scroll down to a Blast! entry dated May 28, 2013 for a project summary)! Handicap curb ramps have been completed and the paving will occur tomorrow. Grindings were donated to the Blythe Border Patrol station to be used on the parking lot. It is a relatively small payment to the Border Patrol for all the services the agency provides to the Palo Verde Valley.



June 3, 2013: One of the many handicap ramps installed on Bell Lane

Construction on the Dollar General store, being built on the northeast corner of the intersection of 9th Street and Hobsonway, is also moving very quickly.



June 4, 2013: Work progressing quickly on the Dollar General foundation

May 28, 2013

BELL LANE STREET GRIND & OVERLAY PROJECT COMMENCES

Yet another paving project is underway in Blythe, this one occurring on Bell Lane (off 14th Street). Crews from Granite Construction, the successful bidder of the project, mobilized early this morning. The project entails constructing handicap curb cuts (ramps) at every corner, where none existed previously, as well as a complete grind and asphalt overlay of the riding surface. Considered one of the worst streets in Blythe, the project will ensure better transportation for both pedestrians and vehicles. The cost of the project, roughly \$300,000, will be covered entirely by Measure A and not by the General Fund.

Bell Lane, May 28, 2013: Preparing to install handicap curb ramps





May 28, 2013: Following installation of the handicap ramps, new asphalt will be placed

May 8, 2013

STATE THREATENS TO CLOSE BLYTHE COURTHOUSE

In yet another desperate move by the state of California, the City has been advised that the state may close the Blythe courthouse, thereby causing significant harm to the local economy, the City's budget, and the public as a whole. Due to budget constraints, the state may consider closing the courthouse 2-3 days per month or completely. The latter would mean that all criminal and civil cases will be heard in Indio or elsewhere in Riverside County. The cost in police overtime could be prohibitive and has the possibility of causing a significant budget problem. Additionally, the loss of revenue to local businesses will be felt, to say nothing of the inconvenience to Blythe residents who will have to travel a minimum of 200 miles round trip for all court-related issues. The potential number of jobs to be lost has not yet been determined. The City suggests that you object strongly by writing to Assemblyman Manuel Perez, County Supervisor John Benoit, the Presiding Judge in Riverside County, and to the Governor himself. The state is apparently moving quickly on the potential closure so time is of the essence. Addresses are as follows:

V. Manuel Perez, Assemblyman 56th District
45-677 Oasis Street
Indio, CA 92201

John Benoit, Riverside County Supervisor, Second District
73-710 Fred Waring Drive, Suite 222
Palm Desert, CA 92260

Jerry Brown, Governor, State of California

c/o State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Judge Mark Cope, Presiding Judge, Riverside County
4050 Main Street
Riverside, CA 92501

April 19, 2013

MORE “MYTHS” DEBUNKED – HERE WE GO AGAIN

As occurs from time-to-time, there is more “misinformation” being spread around Blythe so the purpose of this Blast! entry is to set the record straight, yet again, and to inform people of that which is really happening with City government. The most recent bit of “misinformation”, published on April 11, 2013, begins with a continued criticism of the City’s decision some years ago to erect the popular electronic message sign that sits in the median on Hobsonway at Spring Street. Anyone is free to criticize it, that’s not the point, but the aforementioned criticism was, once again, factually incorrect; to wit: The source of the misinformation states, in part, “Let’s start with the \$50,000 sign downtown....The \$50,000 just went to the cost of the sign...” That is incorrect. The sign was purchased new, still in the crate, from a local business at a cost of \$25,000. Total cost of installation was \$13,084. By the way, this great deal for the City included not one, but two signs. The original owner paid \$64,000 for the signs so \$25,000 was quite a bargain for the City. The irony of the criticism is that the money came from the now-dissolved Redevelopment Agency and that if the sign had not been purchased, the money would have eventually been sent to Sacramento and not used for any reason whatsoever in Blythe. And, as the source of the misinformation knows, Redevelopment funds could not have been used for routine City services and programs. So to imply that there were better uses for the \$25,000 would be misleading. All things considered, with the choices coming down to the signs or nothing, the signs, in hindsight, continue to make perfect sense. It should also be restated that purchase of the signs was discussed publicly a number of times by the City Council and approved unanimously by the City Council.

The source of misinformation also criticizes the fact that feel-good, positive news about City government is sometimes posted on the sign. The source of the misinformation is often quick to claim that the government should be transparent, and Blythe government obviously is, but that transparency should also include the public’s right to hear all things about its government, yes, even *good* things, not just the constant barrage of negative things it reads elsewhere. Should the public know, for instance, that the terrible budget mess hidden until 2008 is getting sorted out? Isn’t it considered “transparent” to tell the public that its tax dollars are now being handled properly? One would think that the public would like to know that important bit of information. There also does not appear to be any other media source willing to release these positive bits of information so what’s wrong with posting the information on the signs so that the public knows the truth?

Finally, let’s take a look at the types of messages that routinely appear on the sign; all would seemingly be welcomed by the public and they provide a wealth of information:

--High school football schedule

- Youth sports sign-ups
- Chamber events including concerts, Miss Blythe pageant, mixers, and ribbon-cuttings
- City Council meeting schedules
- City auctions
- Cinco de Mayo celebration
- Public Service announcements.

So the City must ask, what's wrong with these types of messages being posted on signs purchased with money that would otherwise have been sent to a desperate, money-grabbing state government?

The next bit of misinformation from the printed source is a continued criticism of a future Blythe Welcome Center. Work on this project began a number of years ago as one of the four, formally-adopted, *unanimously-approved*, Goals and Objectives of the City Council. As stated above, criticism is certainly welcome but the facts were again incorrect; and the same source continues to print the same misstatements. The first of many misstatements by the written source states, in part, "Next let's look at the nearly \$800,000 being spent on a study to determine the feasibility of moving the Riviera Drive, I-10 off-ramp to build a \$5 million Welcome Center...". There are many problems with that statement; first, the City is spending money on construction design, not a "feasibility study". The final product will be formal, written plans, prepared jointly by Riverside County and Caltrans, from which a contractor will one day be able to bid construction of the project. This fact has been stated many times in many different settings but the source of misinformation continues its "error". And in this case, the misstatement of facts is even worse than the previous time it was misstated. Scroll down to a Blast! entry dated April 18, 2011, to read more of this very same discussion. The next problem with the referenced quote is the \$800,000 figure itself; not only is the City *not* spending money on a "study", it is also *not spending \$800,000 on anything* let alone a "feasibility study". The cost of the design work will be just over half that amount. The following is an excerpt from yet another Blast! entry, one dated February 17, 2012; it is the response by the City Manager to a question asked of him by KJMB radio host Jim Morris. Mr. Morris asked the question because the same source of misinformation today was spreading the same misinformation even back at that time. It is interesting to note that the misinformation spread at that time said the "study" expenditure was \$500,000 but today the source claims it is \$800,000:

"This is the goal that goes back to your original question about the Council voting to spend \$500,000 on a feasibility study and as I said earlier, that is untrue. We already know it's feasible. The council voted to spend \$450,000 of Measure A funds for the complete design of a new off-ramp, a new on-ramp, and closing the existing Riviera Drive exit. The contract is with Riverside County Transportation and, when completed, the deliverables will not be a study but rather full design of all the work needed to be done."

Why, then, does the source of the misinformation continue to mislead the public with a continual reference to a "feasibility study"? The next problem with the misinformation is something about a \$5 million Welcome Center. The City is unaware of the \$5 million need, what it references, and where the number came from. The City has never indicated that a Welcome Center will cost any certain amount, let alone \$5 million. In fact, the City

previously applied for Prop 84 grant funding, in the amount of \$1.1 million, that, if awarded, would have been used to construct a basic visitors park in the area in support of a future Welcome Center. The \$5 million reference is therefore a mystery.

And still more problems with the referenced misinformation; the source goes on to say, in part, “The Welcome Center study money originally was to pay for expanding and repaving Defrain...”. This is an absurd statement. The City isn’t using *any* of the “Defrain” money on the welcome center design. It is curious as to how the facts get so twisted. But since the topic of the “Defrain” money has come up, here’s the real story -- again: Years ago, when the funds were first identified, they had to be programmed toward a possible project and staff, at the time, selected Defrain. But it should be pointed out further that the City Council never formally programmed the funds to any project, Defrain included. It would have been a project done jointly with the County, since part of Defrain is in the unincorporated area, but the County went on record long ago indicating it had no interest in pursuing the project. Can the funds in question ultimately be used on Defrain? Yes. Can they also be used to construct the new off and on ramps required to move the Riviera Dr. exit while simultaneously supporting a welcome center? Yes again.

And even more problems with the misstatements surrounding this project; the source of the misinformation fails to state, as is common knowledge, that Caltrans has indicated numerous times that the Riviera Drive exit is unsafe and must be moved. What a great partnership it will be when that exit is moved and moved in a manner that simultaneously facilitates future construction of a welcome center. So when you read from the complainant that the City is “.... moving the Riviera Drive, I-10 off-ramp to build a \$5 million Welcome Center...”, that is simply not accurate.

A final word on the Welcome Center; also as has been stated by the City many times in many different settings, this is not a new concept. City resolution number 93-343, adopted on November 10, 1993, supports the concept of a welcome center and even placed it in the very same location and for the same reasons! Voting “aye” back then were Council members Martindale, Kalian, Gallegos, and Rodriguez (Farrage was absent). The City Council members who adopted the recent plan were unaware of the actions of their 1993 counterparts so it was interesting when the two plans met up by sheer happenstance. So for the past 20 years, multiple city councils have seen the need to work toward pulling cars off the freeway and into Blythe and to improve public safety.

The next bit of misinformation has to do with the source’s apparent dislike of a graffiti tracker system purchased for the police department. The complaint seems to be that there was no reason for the City Council to have approved money for the system because, according to the source of misinformation, “....the department received an extra \$200,000 in this year’s budget”. Once again, that is an incorrect statement. The total increase in the police department from last fiscal year to this was \$130,382; it is unknown where the complainant came up with the figure of \$200,000. And let’s put the \$130,382 into perspective; the police department, already running in an extremely lean manner, had a total budget for last fiscal year of \$4,564,519. An increase of \$130,382, therefore, amounted to a miniscule 2.8%. What organization of that size, or any other for that

matter, does not see inherent operating cost increases from one year to the next? It is highly unlikely that any other organization with a budget of over \$4,000,000 holds its increases to \$130,000. Furthermore, the current Chief of Police is to be commended for doing an outstanding job with a budget that is nearly \$550,000 *less* than the amount adopted in 2008, the year the City's huge budget deficit was discovered. A paltry 2.8% increase should be considered extremely positive. How so? From 2008 to last fiscal year, the police budget declined for two reasons: 1) Every department has had to do more with less because of the huge deficit run up from 1998-2008, and 2) There was no money to continue to operate the department at the level it had been all those years that contributed to the large deficit. But in the current fiscal year, it should be considered a very positive thing that the budget was finally strong enough to allow the City to beef up this vitally-important public safety department, thereby supporting the men and women who put their lives on the line daily for the rest of us. Great job, Chief Smith, and our thanks to your dedicated staff. And while we're at it, our thanks also to all City employees for getting the City back on track these past five years.

April 2, 2013

CITY BUDGET MAKES HUGE GAIN YET AGAIN!

The City is pleased to announce that, for a fourth, consecutive year, the General Fund budget has *AGAIN* ended the year in the black! What this means is that the City once again spent less money than it took in. And in the case of the latest financial audit, for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2012, the savings was a *WHOPPING \$551,000!* The City reported last year around this time that the 3-year stretch (at that time) of positive budget numbers was the first, multi-year stretch of such news in 13 years. Now the City has added yet another year to the current trend! This is tremendous news for the City especially in light of the fiscal gloom and doom being discussed elsewhere. This trend would not have occurred without the directions of the various City Councils and the hard work and sacrifices of all City employees.

So what does this mean overall for the huge budget deficit discovered in 2008? The savings of \$551,000 obviously helps tremendously. The following is a brief history of the budget problem and its current status:

August 2008: The City discovered the General Fund was \$3.4 million **in the hole**; additionally, the golf course fund, the airport fund, and a transportation fund were also in the hole by another \$1 million+ *each*. In total, the City was facing a combined **deficit of nearly \$7 million** with no relief in sight.

July 2012: After three years of great fiscal progress, the current fiscal year began with the General Fund deficit down to approximately \$2.5 million (down from the original \$3.4 million). Still a very nasty number but substantial progress had clearly been made.

Mid Year: The old airport deficit of \$1.1 million had to be addressed. The City Council elected to write off \$680,000 of that amount as a bad loan by the

Sewer Fund (as that was the source of the money for the airport for the period 1998-2008). The balance of \$430,000 had to be added to the General Fund deficit, raising it back up from \$2.5 million to nearly \$3 million.

Current: With the great news as discussed above regarding the current savings of \$551,000, the General Fund deficit is now back down to approximately \$2.4 million.

Outlook: With just three months left in the current fiscal year, barring any unforeseen emergencies, all indications are that the current year's budget will be the **FIFTH, CONSECUTIVE YEAR** of ending in black ink come this June 30! That won't be known, of course, until the next fiscal audit is performed later this year.

February 27, 2013

MID-YEAR BUDGET REVIEW REFLECTS STRONG CITY BUDGET

During the City Council meeting of February 26, 2013, the City's Interim Finance Director advised the City Council that a mid-year review of the current City budget was very positive. Expenditures are below estimates and many revenue sources are higher than anticipated. The budget, as adopted at the beginning of the City's fiscal year which runs from July 1 through June 30, continues to be a strong, realistic budget that provides critical, core services while continuing to eat into the City's long term deficit.

PRELIMINARY AUDIT INDICATES CITY BUDGET CONTINUES TO MAKE GREAT STRIDES

A brief history of the City's General Fund reflects that, from 1998 through 2008, the City racked up a deficit of \$3.4 million as reflected in the audit for fiscal year 2007-2008. Since that time, the City has steadily climbed out of that deep hole and the latest audit findings reflect that the City again made huge progress. According to the auditor's preliminary numbers (and therefore not yet official), the City ate into the deficit by nearly \$500,000 in fiscal year 2011-2012 (for the period covering July 1, 2011 through June 30, 2012). This tremendous progress makes it four, consecutive years in which the City's budget has ended the year with a surplus. The last time that happened in Blythe was 14 years ago. As has been the case for the past four years, the City budget, while operating with literally no reserves whatsoever as it continues to work on erasing the deficit, does not have a structural problem and does not anticipate shortfalls for the coming year.

CITY SAYS GOOD-BYE TO TWO, LONG-TERM DEPARTMENT HEADS

Finance Director Helen Colbert, a long-term employee of the City of Blythe, retired this past December after 33 years of dedicated service. Additionally, Public Works Director Jim Rodkey also retired in December after nearly 23 years of loyal service to the City. Not only will it be extremely difficult to replace 56 years of combined service, Helen and Jim will be missed greatly by their colleagues. The City wishes them well in their hard-earned retirement.

January 18, 2013

**COUNTY WASTE DEPARTMENT TO PROVIDE FREE HOUSEHOLD
HAZARDOUS WASTE COLLECTION EVENT IN BLYTHE**

The Riverside County Waste Management Department has scheduled a free household hazardous waste collection event to be held on Saturday, February 23, in Blythe at the County Administration Center, starting at 9 a.m. The collection is open to all Riverside County residents. The Department provides an opportunity for Riverside County residents to keep hazardous waste out of the county landfills and ensure that it is properly managed. The event will accept residentially generated household hazardous wastes from Riverside County residents only. Business or non-profit waste will not be accepted. Typical wastes include used motor oil, paint, antifreeze, household and automotive batteries, pesticides, cleaning products, sharps (needles/syringes or lancets), fluorescent lamps, and electronic wastes such as televisions, computers, VCRs and telephones. Limit the amount of waste transported to no more than fifteen gallons or 125 pounds maximum per vehicle. The collection will not accept explosives, radioactives, ammunition, asbestos, compressed gas cylinders over 40 pounds, and infectious or medical waste other than sharps. The event is subject to cancellation during inclement weather or for other hazardous conditions as determined by the county. The event will run from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at 260 North Broadway Street. For more information, contact Riverside County Waste Management Department at (951) 486-3200 or (800) 304-2226, or www.rivcowm.org.

November 2, 2012

CITY RECEIVES FINAL APPROVAL FOR NEW CNG FUELING STATION

In a Blast! article posted way back on July 22, 2011 (scroll way down to find it), it was announced that the City was pursuing construction of a compressed natural gas (CNG) fueling station to be used primarily to fuel the Palo Verde Valley Transit Agency's buses. The source of funding would be a grant received many years ago from the Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District, the purpose of which was to improve air quality in the region. Design of the fueling system, which will be constructed in the City's Public Works yard, was completed some time ago and has been awaiting final approval by the District. That approval was granted earlier this week and the project can now move forward to the competitive bidding phase.

October 25, 2012

CITY COUNCIL GIVES CHIEF OF POLICE VOTE OF CONFIDENCE

Police Chief Steve Smith who resigned abruptly on October 16, 2012, received a public Vote of Confidence from the Blythe City Council during this past Tuesday evening's City Council meeting. During the meeting, a number of employees and citizens spoke publicly on behalf of Chief Smith and after the 4-1 Council vote of confidence, (Councilman Mike Evans dissented), the Chief received a standing ovation from a majority of those in attendance including a majority of the City Council members.

October 23, 2012

DISPELLING FINANCIAL MYTHS AGAIN

Contrary to what you may have been finding elsewhere, there is no truth to the story that the City's auditors "forced City officials" to account for a \$1.1 million debt. Also contrary to the story, there is no truth to the statement that there was "refusal" on the part of the auditors to complete the audit. The truth is that the City's auditors advised staff that they would be unable to finish their audit until the debt, dating back to 1996, is formally settled. The auditors started a dialogue with staff and both parties agreed, as did the City Attorney, that the old debt had to be accounted for by existing Funds. The debt was run up between 1996 and 2008 relating to expenses at the Blythe Municipal Airport. The Airport Fund was run into a hole of \$1.1 million (which is above and beyond the \$3.4 million General Fund deficit that was discovered in late 2008) which consisted of \$680,000 borrowed from the Sewer Fund and the balance of expenses being paid at the time by the General Fund. The only things the auditors suggested doing were recommending to the City Council that it formally write off the \$680,000 as a bad loan from the Sewer Fund and that the General Fund absorb the balance of approximately \$430,000. All is well between the City and its auditors! Finally, and contrary to the same news source, there is no truth whatsoever to the innuendo that news of this old debt "comes in the wake of Finance and Public Works director's retirement announcements". The two are not linked in any manner.

October 17, 2012

SPLASH PAD FOR TODD PARK TO BECOME REALITY SOON!

After two years of scratching, clawing, and designing, the City will very soon begin design of a splash pad to be constructed in Todd Park! The new water feature will be constructed at the southwest corner of the park in which the horseshoe pits once existed, due east from Smart and Final across Main Street. The roughly \$200,000 project will be funded at no cost whatsoever to the City, thanks entirely to grant funds including a very generous \$95,000 grant from the Community Improvement Fund (CIF). Design will begin shortly with a start of construction date of sometime next spring. If all goes well, the splash pad will be open by the start of next summer! It is important to note that none of the water used will be wasted. The feature will include a 23,000 gallon underground storage tank from which the water will be pumped during the evening hours into the irrigation systems of nearby ball fields. A big City "Thank you" to the CIF for being the final piece of the puzzle that will make this project a reality!

October 15, 2012

OWNERSHIP OF QUECHAN PARK AND MARINA TRANSFERRED TO CITY

During the City Council meeting of October 9, 2012, the City Council approved a series of agreements and related documents transferring ownership of Quechan Park and Marina from the County to the City. The Council's actions concluded a process that began nearly two years ago. The park was previously owned by the County of Riverside Regional Park and Open Space District which has leased it to the City for \$2,000 annually since 2000. The approximately 35-acre park was appraised at \$265,000 and

ownership was transferred to the City through a very creative means which did not require the outlay of funds by the City. More specifically, the County is designing a sewer infrastructure system as part of its Mayflower Park expansion project and needs to connect to the City's system as the County has no utilities in the area. In exchange for ownership of Quechan Park and Marina, the City agreed to waive sewer connection fees that would normally have been owed by the County when Mayflower Park is eventually connected to the City sewer. A spillover benefit of the project will be that county residents living along Colorado River Road will have the option of connecting to the new sewer system once it has been installed. The City has big plans for improvements in Quechan Park so continue to monitor the BlytheBlast! for updated stories.

October 15, 2012

SMART AND FINAL RELOCATION DELAYED

The Smart and Final grocery store, currently located just to the west of Todd Park, has been working on a move to the Commercial Street property previously occupied by Dekens Yamaha. The current store is approximately 9,000 square feet in size and a move to the new location would have allowed the company to expand to a total of 27,000 square feet. The City was working closely with the company on its plans to open the new store as early as next month. In confirming rumors, however, it should be noted that the company is no longer interested in acquiring the former Dekens site due to concerns raised during the routine environmental review stage of the project. The City continues to work with the company in hopes of finding a suitable site. It should also be noted that the former Rite Aid building, located at the east end of the Albertsons shopping center, is not an option. On a more positive note, as a means of expressing its thanks to the City for the manner in which it has worked with the company thus far in fast-tracking the project, Smart and Final has offered \$5,000 to the City to be used for the projects of its choice.

October 15, 2012

CITY BIDS FAREWELL TO BORDER PATROL AGENT GREG BOVINO

The City Council recently presented Patrol Agent in Charge Greg Bovino with a plaque honoring him for his service to the Palo Verde Valley and in particular for his contributions to making Blythe a safer place. Agent Bovino, who has worked closely with Chief of Police Steve Smith over the past four years, is promoting into a new position with the Border Patrol and will be stationed in San Diego County. The plaque was presented to Agent Bovino by Councilman Joey DeConinck during the farewell luncheon held in Agent Bovino's honor last Thursday.

September 28, 2012

PVVTA CELEBRATES 35 YEARS.

In January the Palo Verde Valley Transit Agency (PVVTA) will celebrate 35 years of service to the Palo Verde Valley. A host of activities will be planned for the event and volunteers are needed for the 35th Anniversary Planning Committee. The Committee will create activities and events to honor past and present members of the Agency and celebrate the milestones of the local transit system. If you are interested in being apart of this exciting time for our City, please attend a meeting on Thursday, October 4, 2012 at

2:00pm. The meeting will be held at the Transit Office located at 125 W. Murphy Street. For more information visit us at pvvta.com or give us a call at 760-922-4900.

August 31, 2012

MOSQUITO SPRAYING INTENSIFIED

With the ongoing stretch of humid weather we have been experiencing, the City's Public Works Vector Control Division has stepped up the spraying of mosquitos. Residents are encouraged to use repellent when outdoors in areas where mosquitos are likely to be present; standing water and lawns are favorite hiding places.

August 1, 2012

NEW CITY PARKING LOT TO SERVE TODD PARK COMPLETED

The much-anticipated City parking lot designed to serve primarily the baseball fields at Todd Park is now a reality. Check out the new paving, striping, and sidewalk on Main Street directly across the street from Alexander Field in Todd Park. Local contractor D.J. Miller did an outstanding job. This is yet another City improvement that comes at absolutely no cost to the City, it was all grant-funded!



FISCAL YEAR 2012-2013 CITY BUDGET ADOPTED

During the regular City Council meeting of July 24, 2012, the Blythe City Council adopted the FY2012-2013 City budget. The new fiscal year, which began July 1, will be the fourth, consecutive year in which the City will operate with a balanced General Fund budget. No layoffs are anticipated and critical, core services including police, fire, water, and sewer will be maintained at adequate levels. Additionally, the City's Recreation Center is also funded for another full year. General Fund financial impacts of the loss of Redevelopment have been minimal and the City attributes this to judicious budgeting and

spending over the past four years. Additionally, the fiscal audit for FY2010-2011 reflects a third, consecutive year in which the General Fund ended the budget year with a surplus. This three-year stretch of black ink is the first time this has occurred in Blythe in 13 years. The audit for FY11-12 is now underway and the City is anticipating yet a fourth, consecutive year of good news. Money remains extremely tight, however, with no reserves, as the bulk of the General Fund shortfall of \$3.4 million created from 1998-2008 remains. The City has made up approximately \$1 million of that shortfall over the past three years, however the City acknowledges there is still a long way to go.

ELECTRONIC MESSAGE SIGN FIXED

With crossed fingers, the City is pleased to announce that the sign has been fixed and at minimal cost. The problem resulted from an energy spike that fried some components. New safeguards have been added to keep this from occurring again.

July 13, 2012

ELECTRONIC MESSAGE SIGN ALMOST FIXED!

The sign is back in operation, and, although it still needs some fine tuning, it is again displaying informative and important information to the community. Thanks to local resident Phil Rains for fixing it at no cost to the City.

July 6, 2012

COUNCILMAN DECONINCK ELECTED CHAIRMAN OF CVAG

The City is a member of valley-wide organization, based in Palm Desert, known as the Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG). According to the organization's website, *"CVAG was formed in 1973 under California's Joint Powers Law to address issues of valley-wide significance. Today, CVAG works on a variety of projects important to the Coachella Valley, both as the lead agency and as part of larger teams."*

Guided by CVAG's professional and experienced staff, numerous advisory committees such as Transportation, Energy and Environment, Homelessness, and the Technical Advisory Committee, research topics and formulate recommendations for ultimate consideration by the top committee, the Executive Committee. Comprised only of elected officials, the Executive Committee directs the overall work of the organization. Each year the Executive Committee elects a Chair and a Vice-Chair and the new Chairman for the fiscal year beginning July 1, elected unanimously by his peers, is Blythe's own Councilman Joey DeConinck. The new Vice Chairman is La Quinta Mayor Don Adolph.

The Chair and Vice-Chair are elected during the annual CVAG General Assembly, this year held on June 25 at the Classic Club in Palm Desert. During this year's event, it was noted that Councilman DeConinck has the best meeting attendance record of all members of the Executive Committee. At the conclusion of the meeting, Chairman DeConinck's first, official order was to decree that all meetings in fiscal year 2012-2013 will be held in Blythe. After some nervous laughter, the many attendees present got the joke.

CVAG member organizations include the Cities of Blythe, Cathedral City, Coachella, Desert Hot Springs, Indian Wells, Indio, La Quinta, Palm Desert, Palm Springs, and

Rancho Mirage. Membership also includes Riverside County, the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, and the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians. The Executive Director of CVAG, Mr. Tom Kirk, is slated to make a brief presentation to the Blythe City Council during the council meeting of July 10, 2012.

DOLLAR GENERAL STORE STILL MOVING FORWARD

Developers have been working with the City for more than a year on the construction of a Dollar General store to be built on a vacant lot located at the northeast corner of the intersection of 9th Street and Hobsonway. Not to be confused with a typical “dollar” store, the company’s website states, in part, *“Goodlettsville, Tennessee-based Dollar General Corporation is the nation’s largest small-box discount retailer. We make shopping for everyday needs simpler and hassle-free by offering a carefully edited assortment of the most popular brands at low everyday prices in small, convenient locations.”* The Blythe store is expected to be just over 12,000 square feet in size.

July 3, 2012

A CITY MAKING PROGRESS!

These are exciting times here in Blythe as there is much going on in terms of building and development! Read the following articles to get a sense of that which is going on all around us! The past 12-18 months have been very busy and the City’s efforts are becoming more evident each day!

NEW PAVEMENT AROUND TOWN

The City recently completed an aggressive grind and overlay project in a number of areas around town. Utilizing a new, \$50,000 grant secured by the City (thereby stretching those local tax dollars even more!), those streets receiving new asphalt include Lovekin Boulevard from Seville south to Barnard, Chanslorway westward from Lovekin, and Chanslorway from Ranchette Road east to Highway 95. The grindings also found uses around town; over 100 loads were donated to the Palo Verde Irrigation District for use in its yard on 14th Ave. and the shoulders of parts of Defrain Ave. and East Hobsonway were also built up. PVID crews repaired the shoulders in this manner in exchange for the grindings it received. Additionally, the County library parking lot located at the northwest corner of the intersection of Chanslorway and Broadway was completely paved and striped. Although the library paid for the job, the City saved the library a lot of money by including the project in with the street projects discussed immediately above and achieved the savings through economies of scale. Finally, the City’s vacant lot located on Main Street due west of Alexander Field in Todd Park is currently being prepared for pavement as it will then serve as a parking lot for those visiting the park.

NEW PARK RESTROOMS COMPLETED

Two new restrooms have been completed and are now open to the public. Check out these new buildings in Miller and Appleby Parks. They were constructed completely with grant funds with no cost whatsoever to the City.

THIRD NEW RESTROOM PLANNED

As part of the ongoing Quechan Park/Marina improvement project that began last year, another new restroom is close to becoming a reality. This new structure will be identical in design to those just completed in Miller and Appleby Parks. It will be constructed just to the north of the existing restroom and is expected to be in place before the end of the year. Read more about all the Quechan Park/Marina improvements in previous BlytheBlast! articles dated January 31, 2012 and November 29, 2011.

NEW RITE AID STORE MOVING ALONG

The new, 17,500 square foot Rite Aid store, complete with a drive-through pharmacy being constructed at the southwest corner of the intersection of Hobsonway and 7th Street, is coming together quickly. The company is planning a festive grand opening for sometime in late September.

NEW SMART AND FINAL

The Blythe Smart and Final store, currently located at the northwest corner of the intersection of Main and Barnard Streets, will be moving to a much larger facility later this year. Currently operating out of a building of approximately 9,000 square feet, the new store will be more than 27,000 square feet in size. The new location will be the former Dekens Yamaha building located just north of Hobsonway between Ash and Commercial Streets. The company expects a grand opening to be held in November.

NEW MCDONALD'S RESTAURANT

The iconic McDonald's, a fixture on Lovekin Boulevard for many years, was recently razed and is being completely rebuilt. The modern store is expected to be open before the end of the year.

NEW NATURAL GAS SERVICE STATIONS MAKING PROGRESS

In a BlytheBlast! article dated July 22, 2011 (scroll down to read the article), a proposed Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG)/Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) service station was discussed. The City was successful at securing a large grant for HayDay Farms, the developer of the project, and that project is now moving forward. The company purchased a vacant lot east of Lovekin Blvd. (behind the USA gas station) and is currently working with the City to entitle the project. Additionally, the City is currently working on the development of its own CNG filling station, to be located within the City's Public Works yard, for the purpose of providing CNG for its transit buses. Both projects are moving forward and should be taking shape in the coming months.

CITY SEEKING CAMP HOST FOR QUECHAN PARK

In an effort to provide more services at Quechan Park, the City Council recently approved a contract through which a camp host, or perhaps two, will set up in Quechan Park. These volunteers will receive free space rent, water, and sewer services in exchange for providing 20 hours per week of service. Typical duties will include providing information to visitors, ensuring compliance with park admission and parking requirements, as well as miscellaneous light housekeeping chores. Contact City Hall if you know of someone who may be interested in applying for the position(s).

BRIGHT FUTURE FOR BELEAGUERED BLYTHE SOLAR PROJECT?

In previous articles (scroll down to entries of April 6, 2012, September 28, 2011, and July 5, 2011), the once-bright future and then bankruptcy of what was to be the world's largest solar project were discussed. Germany-based Solar Millennium, doing business in America as Solar Trust of America, had planned on building a 1,000 megawatt solar plant on approximately 6,000 acres northwest of Blythe. Additionally, it planned on building a plant half that size near Palen. Solar Trust filed for bankruptcy last December, however both the Blythe and Palen projects have recently been purchased. NextEra acquired the Blythe project while Bright Source Energy purchased the Palen project. It is unknown at the current time what these acquisitions mean for the immediate future of the projects but the fact that the assets were acquired bodes well for more jobs coming to the area.

ELECTRONIC MESSAGE SIGN STILL HAVING PROBLEMS

As you may have noticed, the City's electronic message sign on Hobsonway has been out for some time. An inexpensive fix to the problem has been elusive and, although a quick fix can be had, the City is reluctant to spend the money if there is a cheaper (or free) means of getting the job done. The City thanks you for your patience as it works to fix the problem, hopefully at no or very little cost.

April 27, 2012

NEW PARK RESTROOMS COMING ALONG NICELY

The two new restrooms approved earlier this year by the City Council are going up very quickly. The top picture is that of the new structure in Appleby Park, being constructed near the southwest corner of the park. The bottom picture is of the Miller park restroom which is a couple of weeks behind the Appleby Park restroom. It is being built just north of the existing restroom, close to 14th Ave. Expect them to both be open very soon!

New restroom in Appleby Park and Miller Park – photo taken April 27, 2012



April 27, 2012

NEW SCHOOL SPEED LIMIT SIGNS NOW BEING INSTALLED

The City is currently in the process of installing new, state-of-the-art school speed limit signs. The solar-powered signs have built-in radar which instantly relays a car's speed to the approaching driver and flashes if the car is moving too fast. The eight signs were purchased, at no cost to the City, with funds received from a Safe Routes to School grant.

April 24, 2012

INTERPRETING YOUR MONTHLY UTILITY BILL

For those of you who receive a monthly utility bill from the City, understanding the charges can be confusing at times. Although the bill is very often referred to as the "water bill", it includes charges for all utilities provided by the City with water being just one of them. In fact, water usage by residential customers is typically the least expensive part of the bill. Other charges are included for sewer, wastewater, trash collection, loan repayment, and County landfill (dump). In an effort to answer questions that many residents may have, the next monthly bill, to be mailed shortly, will include an insert explaining each line and charge on it. On the back side of that insert is a sample utility bill for reference. Below is the "Frequently Asked Questions" section of the insert:

Monthly Utility Bill Frequently Asked Questions

Confused by your monthly utility bill? You're not alone! Read on for an explanation of the fees charged. On the reverse is a sample bill for reference.

1. I see two charges on my utility bill that appear to be similar. One is called "Waste Water" and the other is called "Sewer". What's the difference and why am I charged two fees?

The "Sewer" fee covers the collection and transmission of sewage and wastewater. Once we flush a toilet or pour liquid into a sink drain, contents are collectively known as "wastewater" and immediately enter the City's vast system of underground pipes on its way to the sewer plant. The City maintains over 60 miles of transmission pipes that operate generally by gravity. With that many miles of pipes, however, the wastewater needs help along the way at times as it heads for the sewer plant. That help is provided in the form of "lift stations" (there are 19 total throughout the city). The pumps in the lift stations help boost the wastewater on its way to the next lift station and ultimately to its final destination, the sewer plant.

The "Waste Water" fee covers the cost of treating the wastewater once it reaches the sewer plant (also known as the wastewater treatment plant) on South Broadway. Think of this fee as the money needed to pay for all plant operating costs such as chemicals, equipment, infrastructure, labor, etc.

2. Why am I charged a fee called the "State Revolving Fund – Water Treatment Plant"?

This fee was imposed back in 2003 as a way to collect the money needed to repay an interest-free loan received from the State Revolving Fund (SRF) used to construct the water

plant located on Chanslorway. Our “SRF” fee is forwarded to the State of California as a loan payment and is not otherwise utilized by the City.

3. What is the “County Landfill” fee?

The county landfill (“the dump”), located north of the city on Lovekin Blvd., is owned and operated by Riverside County. As anyone who has hauled items to the dump knows, the facility charges a fee for use. This is no different for the City’s contracted waste hauler, CR&R (for years the company that collected our trash and recyclables was Palo Verde Valley Disposal but the contract was transferred to CR&R in late 2011). CR&R takes our trash to the county landfill and must pay a fee to the County for that disposal. CR&R then passes that cost on to the City and its residents. Our “County Landfill” fee is forwarded to CR&R and is not otherwise utilized by the City.

4. Okay, I understand the “County Landfill” fee but what is the “Sanitation and Recycling” fee?

As explained immediately above, the City contracts with CR&R to collect our trash and recyclables from the bins we place at curbside or an alley. Instead of each resident paying the fee directly to CR&R, the City collects the fee on behalf of the company and then forwards the money directly to it. This not only saves customers postage and checks, it saves the company money on postage and by not having to mail out thousands of individual bills each month; those savings are enjoyed by customers in the form of lower rates.

5. Does the “Water Consumption” fee cover the amount of water I use each month?

Yes, exactly. At a rate of \$1.14 per every thousand gallons of water used each month, this is very likely (although not confirmed) the lowest rate for water usage in the entire state of California! In general, the more we use, the more we pay. Want to lower your bill? It’s easy, use less water (and help save a resource)!

6. “Water Base Demand – 1” meter” is very confusing to me; what is this fee?

Water meters, which are typically found in your front yard very close to the street and enclosed in a small concrete box with a removable lid, come in varying sizes to accommodate varying needs. Meters can be as small as 5/8” or as large as 8”; a 1” meter is standard for a residence. The fee covers the meter and related costs of providing water service including reading the meter each month to determine consumption.

April 17, 2012

MAY IS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING SAFETY MONTH

May is International Building Safety Month recognizing the importance of safe buildings in our community. Public safety is the number one concern of the City of Blythe building inspectors who enforce building codes that result in safe construction. City staff will be on hand to explain codes and building safety and to answer any questions you may have. Come visit the Building Department located at City Hall at 235 North Broadway.

April 13, 2012

FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE BLYTHEBLAST!

Tomorrow marks the first anniversary of the very first article written in the BlytheBlast! In that time we have written nearly seventy (70!) articles designed to update you on the many programs, projects, and actions of City government. Come back often to read more about the things going on in Blythe.

April 6, 2012

TWO NEW PARK RESTROOMS ON TARGET

The two new restrooms currently being constructed by the City in Appleby and Miller Parks are going up quickly! The Appleby Park structure is slightly ahead of the Miller Park building but both are progressing rapidly. Drive by and take a look at the progress. Both should be open for use by the end of this month!

April 6, 2012

WORLD'S LARGEST SOLAR PROJECT IN JEOPARDY

Through a number of BlytheBlast! articles over the past year, we discussed the Solar Millennium project that, once constructed, would have been the largest solar plant in the world. You may recall that California Governor Jerry Brown and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar both visited Blythe in June 2011 for the purpose participating in the formal groundbreaking of the project. In December 2011, however, it was learned that the parent company filed for insolvency and earlier this week it was learned further that the U.S. affiliate filed for bankruptcy. In an effort to clarify the players and the issues, the following is a brief chronology of events: In December 2011, Germany-based parent company Solar Millennium filed for insolvency. In the interim, Solar Millennium tried to sell its two U.S. projects, to be constructed in Blythe and Palen by its American affiliate known as Solar Trust of America, to another company called SolarHybrid. In late March 2012, however, SolarHybrid filed for bankruptcy which negated the deal in which it was to have purchased the two Solar Trust projects. Without funding from SolarHybrid therefore, Solar Trust filed for bankruptcy earlier this week. What this means for the near term is that the project has come to an immediate halt. Given the amount of investment in the project, however, it is very likely that another company will eventually buy the Blythe and Palen projects and construct them. The Blythe project in particular already has in place extremely valuable land leases with the Bureau of Land Management and equally valuable Power Purchase Agreements with various utility companies. So while the project may be on hold at the moment, the City is hopeful that it will eventually move forward.

March 9, 2012

NEW PARK RESTROOMS ARE ON THEIR WAY!

The two, new grant-funded restrooms (no cost to the City whatsoever!) to be constructed from the ground up in Appleby and Miller Parks are on the way! Final hurdles have been cleared, the contractor has been provided with a notice to proceed, and work is scheduled to begin next week! The restrooms will be constructed fairly quickly so drive by now and then in the coming weeks to get a sense of what's new in two City parks!

March 9, 2012

“2011: A YEAR IN REVIEW” ANNUAL REPORT NOW AVAILABLE

For the fourth, consecutive year, the City has produced an annual report, the latest edition covering calendar year 2011. Entitled “2011: A Year in Review”, the report is 83 pages of success stories, routine work, and many photos reflecting the tasks performed and projects completed by the City. It was first unveiled during last week’s annual Outlook Conference. The report was written, edited, printed, and compiled in-house. Copies are available for review at City Hall at any of the public counters (Utilities, Development Services, and Administration). Additionally, the report can be reviewed online through the City’s website at www.cityofblythe.ca.gov or through the City’s Facebook page at www.facebook.com/cityofblythe.

March 5, 2012

CITY PARTICIPATES IN ANNUAL COMMUNITY OUTLOOK CONFERENCE

Members of the Blythe City Council once again attended the Blythe Area Chamber of Commerce’s annual Community Outlook Conference, this year held on March 1 and again held at the fairgrounds. With more than 200 attendees, those in the audience heard from guest speakers Riverside County Supervisor John Benoit, Interim County Executive Officer Larry Parrish, Interim Palo Verde College President Denise Whittaker, Community Improvement Fund Executive Director Jay Abbs, and City Manager Dave Lane. On behalf of the City, the City Manager provided updates on the following:

- Continually improving City budget – 3 straight years of black ink!
- Recent installation of pipes in Quechan Marina – completed!
- Design of Visitor Park on Interstate 10 – on track
- Main Street Ice Plant cleanup – completed!
- New restroom to be constructed in Appleby Park – work to start this month!
- New restroom to be constructed in Miller Park – work to start this month!
- New Rite Aid already under construction!
- New Hampton Inn close to reality!
- Possible acquisition of old railroad car(s) as tourist attraction
- Possible sewer project for the Mesa Bluffs area
- Possible housing rehabilitation project
- Solar projects

These are very exciting times in City government with so much happening in and around Blythe. Check back often to read more about these and other projects.

February 17, 2012

RECENT ACTIONS OF THE BLYTHE CITY COUNCIL

During the City Council meeting of February 14, 2012, in addition to routine actions, the City Council also:

1. Directed staff to resume work on the design and environmental review phase of the proposed Visitors Park that may one day be constructed immediately west of the agricultural inspection station on westbound I-10.
2. Awarded a contract to Burrow Construction of Blythe for the construction of two, new restrooms, one each for Appleby Park and Miller Park.

3. Approved a Subdivision Improvement Agreement with Chandra Hospitality as another step toward the construction of a new Hampton Inn to be located at the southeast corner of the intersection of Interstate 10 and Intake Blvd.

NEW RITE AID STORE UNDER CONSTRUCTION!

Check out the construction activity at the southwest corner of the intersection of 7th and Hobsonway. Rite Aid just broke ground on a new, 17,000 square foot store which will include a drive-through pharmacy. If all goes well, the store could be completed and open for business by mid-summer!

February 10, 2012

NEW RITE AID STORE TO BE UNDER CONSTRUCTION SOON

Rite Aid will soon begin construction of a new store to be located at the southwest corner of the intersection of 7th Street and Hobsonway. The City issued a building permit earlier this week and temporary, construction fencing has already been installed around the site. The new store will include a total of 17,615 square feet and will offer a drive-through pharmacy. If all goes well, the store may be open as soon as mid-summer.

February 3, 2012

RUMOR CONTROL: TRAFFIC ISLANDS ON HOBSONWAY

A new rumor making the rounds around town is that the City is considering removing the traffic islands along Hobsonway. You don't even need "Snopes" on this one, the rumor is completely false. The City Council has never even discussed such a project nor has any staff member ever worked on it in any manner whatsoever. This beautification project was completed in 2003-2004 at a cost of \$5.53 million; \$2.1 million of that amount was borrowed by the City and it is still paying on that loan. There is no money to remove the islands even if the rumor happened to be true. Again, no truth at all to the rumor that the traffic islands on Hobsonway are being removed.

January 31, 2012

QUECHAN MARINA IMPROVEMENTS IN FULL SWING

In a BlytheBlast! article dated November 29, 2011, the Quechan Marina project was discussed; refer back to that article (simply scroll down until you get to that date) for project background. The update is that the work began yesterday with much progress being made the past two days alone. The project is expected to take 10 working days to complete. Next up will be construction of a brand new restroom and the installation of picnic benches and shade structures.

FISCAL AUDIT AGAIN SHOWS SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS!

City officials announced today that the draft financial audit for Fiscal Year 2010-2011 reflects that the General Fund ended the year in the black for a third, consecutive year! With the City's decade-old fiscal problems, this is very encouraging news for the City's beleaguered finances.

What's more, it should be noted that this three-year period of 2009-2011 was the first such stretch of time in thirteen years that the City's budget ended

three consecutive years with positive fund balances! The last time this feat was achieved was during the years 1996-1998. Doubly impressive is the fact that the budget continues to make positive advances during what is arguably the worst economy since the Great Depression.

This year's gain was smaller than those achieved in the two previous years, however, and much of that can be attributed to the fact that two local businesses did not forward revenue to the City as required by law. As such, legal actions had to be initiated against both businesses. The cost of those actions, combined with the actual monetary loss as a result of the businesses withholding City funds, cut sharply into the positive fund balance.

More specifically, the new fund balance was a positive \$54,995. Although any positive number is good, it should have been higher. Had the aforementioned businesses actually followed the law, that number would have been closer to \$200,000.

In summary, the budget problem of \$3.4 million identified in the 2008 audit is now down to approximately \$2.4 million. That is still a very large hole, and the City continues to struggle with having no extra disposable income, no reserves whatsoever, and with cash flow issues, however the positive trend in improving the City's finances continues.

January 13, 2012

CITY SALES TAX REVENUE UP

City officials met earlier this week with its sales tax consultant and heard encouraging news about the local economy.

The quarterly meeting covered the third quarter of 2011 which included the months of July, August, and September. Compared to the same period of the previous year, the City's sales tax revenue was up 11.6% and was substantially higher than the statewide increase of 8.6%.

The City's increase also compares very favorably to many other agencies in Riverside County. Out of 28 total agencies, which includes all 27 cities and the unincorporated areas of the county, Blythe's increase ranked an astounding 7th. Coming in first, due in large part to an annexation, was the City of Desert Hot Springs. Bringing up the rear were Canyon Lake and the newly-incorporated City of Eastvale.

According to the consultant, much of the statewide increase can be attributed to higher fuel prices, however sales of new autos, consumer goods, fast food, and full service restaurants also exhibited "solid growth".

For fiscal year 2012-2013, which begins July 1, 2012, the consultant is estimating a sales tax increase for the City of nearly \$50,000 over the current fiscal year. The consultant cautioned, however, that although growth should continue into next fiscal year, it is likely to slow somewhat.

The next quarterly meeting with the tax consultant, to be conducted later this spring, will focus on the 4th quarter of 2011 and will include sales during the holiday shopping season.

December 20, 2011

PALO VERDE VALLEY TRANSIT AGENCY GRANT PERFORMANCE

Earlier this month, the California Emergency Management Agency (Cal EMA) made a site visit to the Palo Verde Valley Transit Agency for the purpose of auditing its grant management practices. The outcome of the audit is best summarized by the final report of Cal EMA, dated December 13, 2011, a portion of which states: "*Cal EMA recognizes that the Palo Verde Valley Transit Agency engages in eligible activities throughout the grant performance period while following the grant guidelines. They are well organized and have in place a very efficient grant management financial tracking system. There were no items of concern addressed during the visit. The Palo Verde Valley Transit Agency has done an excellent job in spending their funds and completing required reporting*". The Palo Verde Valley Transit Agency continues to operate as an efficient and effective partner of the City of Blythe.

December 19, 2011

REDEVELOPMENT BUDGET IN GREAT SHAPE!

During the joint City Council/Redevelopment Board of Directors meeting conducted on Tuesday, December 13, the Redevelopment Agency's fiscal auditor, Rich Teaman of Teaman, Ramirez, and Smith, presented his draft findings on the fiscal year 2010-2011 budget. He indicated that he was issuing an "Unqualified" opinion which is the highest opinion that can be offered by an auditor. Said Mr. Teaman, "*As has been in the past few years we are happy to come forth with an 'unqualified' opinion. It is the highest level of opinion that can be issued on a set of financial statements.*" Two of the more important aspects of a fiscal audit include the money itself and the internal controls used to account for that money; both are in great shape in the Blythe Redevelopment Agency.

December 19, 2011

NEW COUNCILMEMBERS SWORN IN

During the City Council meeting of December 13, new council members Wayne Cusick and Mike Evans were sworn in. Both won election on November 8, 2011. At the same meeting, the Council said good-bye to outgoing Vice Mayor Carie Covell and Councilman Richard Contreras. After a two-year run as Mayor, Joey DeConinck again took up a position as councilman and fellow councilman Oscar Galvan was elected Mayor by his peers. The new Vice Mayor is Sam Patel.

November 29, 2011

UPDATE ON QUECHAN PARK/MARINA IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

In a BlytheBlast! entry dated way back on April 14, 2011, it was reported that one of the City Council's official goals and objectives was a Quechan Park/Marina improvement project. That project was to consist of a culvert pipe between the river and the marina for the purpose of keeping it flushed out, a new restroom, covered picnic areas, and paving the entrance.

The most aggressive part of that project, the culvert pipe, is soon to be a reality. The City has worked very closely with the federal Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) on design and construction of the pipe. The design was completed, and paid for, a few months ago and the City has been awaiting construction cost estimates from the BOR since then.

The City has timed the project to coincide with another BOR project downstream with the thought that as long as BOR crews are already mobilized and in the area, the City could save a lot of money on its project. And that has proven to be the case. Whereas original estimates for the pipe were in the \$300,000-\$350,000 range, the cost estimate received recently from the BOR reflects a cost of \$182,000. This savings will obviously allow the City to install additional improvements.

The construction contract with the BOR is likely to be approved by the City Council in December which will allow the work to proceed during the river's low-water period in January. Construction is expected to take approximately 30 days.

Additionally, the new restroom design has been completed and a construction bid package will hit the streets in the very near future. The park and marina will be vastly improved in time for 2012 spring and summer visitors and events!

Furthermore, it should be noted that all of the improvements are being paid for with funds other than City funds. More specifically, the City received a \$500,000 grant through the state's park bond program and an additional grant of \$213,000 from Riverside County. No City general funds whatsoever are being used on the improvements.

Lastly, the City is currently discussing with the County the possible sale of Quechan Park/Marina to the City. The property is owned by Riverside County but is operated by the City under a multi-year lease. The City Council previously directed staff to pursue purchase of the park. An appraisal has been completed and City officials met again just last week with County officials to discuss possible terms of the sale.

UPBEAT FIRST QUARTER REVIEW OF CITY BUDGET

During the City Council meeting of October 25, 2011, the Council heard a report from staff regarding the status of the City's General Fund budget. The report covered the first quarter of the fiscal year which runs from July 1 through September 30. Staff typically provides a mid-year report early in the calendar year covering the first half of the year but in light of the economy and constant financial rumors out of Sacramento, it was prudent for the City to conduct a first quarter review.

The Council heard that the budget is still stable and that expenditures are significantly under budget. Revenue is always slow this time of year as the City does not receive its first, big infusion of money until the property tax allocations of December and January.

In summary, while the City's General Fund has no extra money and no reserves whatsoever, the budget has remained stable for three years through judicious spending and sound fiscal policies.

November 16, 2011

KJMB RADIO INTERVIEWS CITY MANAGER AND CHIEF OF POLICE

The Blythe City Manager and Chief of Police were recently interviewed by the manager of radio station KJMB. The three had been discussing for some time a format through which residents could relay questions to the radio station that would be answered by the City Manager and Chief with the show playing a number of times on the radio.

The first show was recorded in early November (with more shows planned) and was aired at various times for a number of days by KJMB. The following are the questions and answers from that show; note that the written answers below are more detailed than those provided on the air.

Questions Asked of the City Manager:

Radio Host: I read recently that the City three years ago laid off a management team and replaced them with “a cadre of high-priced Palm Springs-style administrators”. I read further that these new administrators are paid what they would earn in Palm Springs. Do you have a comment on this?

City Manager: Actually, none of what you just stated is true.

The former City Manager and former Chief of Police were not laid off, they retired before Chief Smith and I were hired in the spring and summer of 2008.

The former Assistant City Manager retired in December 2008 after a distinguished 35-year career, he was not laid off nor has he been replaced, by the way, as a cost-savings measure. Keeping that position vacant has saved the City approximately \$162,000 annually.

Finally, the former Planning Director resigned in February 2009 to further her formal education, she was not laid off (nor was she ever replaced with an annual savings of approximately \$143,000).

So the only two employees to whom you can be referring are the Chief of Police and me. As for our salaries being those we could hope to receive in Palm Springs, that is simply untrue and untrue by a wide margin. The Chief of Police in Palm Springs is paid an annual salary, excluding benefits, of almost \$194,000 which is over \$80,000 **more** than Chief Smith earns in Blythe.

The City Manager in Palm Springs earns \$290,000 annually which is \$115,000 more than my salary. So between us, the Chief and I are paid nearly \$200,000 **less** than our counterparts in Palm Springs.

There are 27 cities in Riverside County. As the top law enforcement official in Blythe, Chief Smith’s salary ranks dead last. And my salary ranks next-to-last among City Managers. We aren’t even close to the *averages* of the other 26. I therefore don’t

understand the statement that management salaries paid in Blythe are equal to those earned in Palm Springs; they aren't even close.

But that's a problem affecting all City classifications, we are all paid less than our counterparts elsewhere in Riverside County. As an example, a Police Officer in Palm Springs tops out at about \$74,000 but here in Blythe it's about \$15,000 less. We all understand the economics, however. We're struggling to get out of a decade-old financial hole and lower wages are a reality.

Radio Host: I also read recently that the City Council voted to pay \$500,000 for a feasibility study to determine if the Riviera Drive off ramp can be moved further to the west. Is this true?

City Manager: Certainly not. A little history is in order. Two years ago, the City Council went through an exhaustive exercise designed to identify its top goals and objects for the next year.

The council conducted multiple study sessions and other meetings as the council felt that quantifiable goals would be in the City's best interest and show that council and staff were working towards something attainable and verifiable.

The council eventually ended up with four such goals, one of which was to begin work on a Welcome Center with a park component.

With literally millions of cars traveling I-10 each year, the City Council wanted to find a way to pull them off the freeway just as westbound traffic passed the agricultural checkpoint.

The idea would be to provide a safe place for drivers to exit the freeway and learn through informational kiosks or perhaps even someday a staffed welcome center, events and shopping opportunities in Blythe. And, of course, a park with restroom facilities and a dog run would be a great addition.

The best place for this would be the "Y" split a few hundred feet west of the checkpoint where I-10 veers slightly to the left at the same point the old 60-70 highway veers to the right. To do this, however, would mean closing the existing Riviera Drive off ramp because Caltrans will not allow exits too close together; the minimum distance is typically a mile.

This is the goal that goes back to your original question about the Council voting to spend \$500,000 on a feasibility study and as I said earlier, that is untrue. We already know it's feasible. The council voted to spend \$450,000 of Measure A funds for the complete design of a new off-ramp, a new on-ramp, and closing the existing Riviera Drive exit. The contract is with Riverside County Transportation and, when completed, the deliverables will not be a study but rather full design of all the work needed to be done.

Radio Host: Are there any other agencies or individuals supporting this new project?

City Manager: Yes, actually there are many. The project's first cheerleader was 80th District Assemblyman Manuel Perez. He very early recognized the utility of this heady plan and liked it instantly.

So much so, in fact, that he allowed all Council members to make a presentation on this and other needs to his full staff in Indio during a staff retreat. He has also agreed to seek \$2.5 million for construction of the roadway improvements.

Additionally, Congresswoman Mary Bono Mack is a supporter, Supervisor John Benoit is a supporter, as is Caltrans District 8 Administrator Dr. Ray Wolfe who is leading interference with the federal highway administration on the project. He has personally toured the site with us and is very enthusiastic about it.

Finally, there will be some real estate issues to work out but we have met multiple times with the private property owners involved and the Council approved a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with both of them reflecting their willingness to work with the City to make this project a reality.

And here's a very interesting bit of history...when the City Council came up with the idea of a welcome center/visitors park, its members came up with the idea cold. That is, they weren't building on something that had been previously discussed (well, not to their knowledge, at the time), they adopted a project that needs to be done. What we have found since this project was formally adopted as an official goal of the City is a copy of a City resolution from 1993 that discusses the very same project!

That resolution, number 93-343 and adopted on November 10, 1993, states, in part, *"NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that because of the demonstrated need for a travelers and tourist information center to provide necessary information and materials traveling into California and the land has become available, the City Council of the City of Blythe supports and recommends the establishment of a traveler and tourist information center"*.

So now 18 years later, it has come to light that this visitor park concept has been discussed previously. The difference between then and now, however, is that the City is currently making it happen.

Radio Host: I recently read about the airport and the golf course and the implication was that the City did not have to get rid of the airport and the golf course as they had been managed just fine by the City for many years. What's your take on that?

City Manager: The airport and the golf course between them lost millions of dollars over the course of many years and something drastic had to happen.

The City ran the airport for 14 years and this was another area that was run into a huge, financial hole. We all know the story of the General Fund being in the hole by nearly \$3.5 million but the Airport Fund, which is entirely separate from the General Fund, was also found to be in a hole itself to the tune of more than \$1 million.

Then there is the golf course; same problem. In addition to the General Fund being in a multi-million dollar hole, and the airport being in a million dollar hole, the Golf Course fund, which is also separate from the General Fund, was also in a hole by more than \$1 million. Clearly, something had to give and the decisions the City Council made to divest itself of these two operations is proving so far to have been extremely wise decisions.

Radio Host: There is always talk off and on about taxes. We keep reading that the City Council is trying to impose taxes on local residents. Can they actually do that?

City Manager: Very simply, no, not at all, there is no way the City Council can impose taxes on anyone for any reason. I don't know how to say that any more clearly. Again, no, *the City Council CANNOT impose or raise ANY taxes*. Only the voters can put into place new or increased taxes. Proposition 218 of 1996 took care of that so again, there is no truth to the rumor that the City Council can raise or create taxes.

So when you hear at times that the Council may be considering new taxes, the only thing being considered is whether or not the council will place a tax measure on the ballot so that residents may vote on it themselves. If the council decides to place an item on the ballot, we all get to vote on it; if the council decides that it does not want to place an item on the ballot, we don't get to vote on it.

Radio Host: We hear a lot about the electronic message sign in the center of town. We hear that the City should not have bought it for \$25,000 and that the money should have been spent on staff. What's your take on these comments?

City Manager: We receive positive comments regularly from people who like it and appreciate the detailed information we put up now and then.

As for the money, it is first important to understand that it was a great deal. The original invoice showed a price paid by a local business of \$64,000. The City bought it, still brand new and in its original packing crate, for \$25,000.

The money came from the Redevelopment Agency. Redevelopment funds can only be used for specific purposes and one of them is NOT hiring staff for routine City work.

So if the council had not bought the sign, it would also **not** have used the money on staff, road work, park maintenance, or any other routine City service.

And here's an interesting twist...we all know that Governor Brown is trying to eliminate all Redevelopment agencies statewide and take all the money to help balance the state's budget. The only thing keeping him from doing that right now is a lawsuit filed by a

number of cities, on behalf of all other cities, in an attempt to keep him from taking our money.

If Governor Brown is successful in court, and he takes all of our money, it will be of some comfort that Blythe spent \$25,000 on a sign that will be here for years and the money spent in that manner won't be sent to Sacramento.

Radio Host: What is the current, actual status of the City's General Fund budget?

City Manager: I'm as tired of saying "\$3.4 million in the hole" as people are of hearing it but the fact remains that the General Fund was in a hole that deep as of June 30, 2008 when that year's audit was done. That was a huge number 10 years in the making. The main problem for those 10 years preceding that date was that the City literally spent more money than it took in, and in some years the difference was astronomical.

But that has changed for the better the last few years. For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2009, the budget ended \$287,000 to the good and in 2010, the budget ended \$567,000 to the good. It is also significant to note that this 2-year total of \$854,000 was achieved during what is arguably the worst economy since the Great Depression. What occurs next with these year-ending numbers is that that are deducted from (or added to in case of a year ending up in the red) the aforementioned \$3.4 million.

So although the General Fund is still in a very deep hole, that hole has gotten shallower each year since 2008. As of today, the hole is about \$2.5 million (\$3.4 million *minus* \$854,000). The audit for 2011 is going on right now and our hope and expectation is that the auditors will find that it also ended the year in the black – which is good, by the way! It's RED that is bad!

One very positive aspect of the budget is that there is no structural deficit as you hear about in so many other cities and other organizations and there is currently no budget problem. We have no extra income and no reserves whatsoever, there is no denying that, and this is a hand-to-mouth operation, but there is no structural problem making it worse each year.

We are getting better financially with each passing day and that is due primarily to two factors; the first is the policies and practices of the city councils over the past three years and the second is the sacrifices and efforts of City employees. They all continue to do more with less and are always conscious of the City's fiscal issues.

There was even an instance in City Hall about a year ago in which there was no toilet paper. Employees didn't want to spend money on it, which is clearly a legitimate expense, so we all brought in a few packs or rolls! Quite obviously, saving money on toilet paper isn't going to save the City but the entire episode was funny and quite telling.

Radio Host: Another thing I read recently indicated that the City "refused" to install flashing crosswalks on 14th Ave. that would have protected students from Appleby

School. I have driven through there myself and see that stops signs and crosswalks are in place; why the confusion?

City Manager: First, the statement that the City refused to install improvements is untrue. Never happened. As you indicated in your question, the improvements are in place and were provided jointly by the City and the school district.

The quick background is that the new Appleby School is located in the county, not the City. Additionally, it is important to note that, by law, school construction is exempt from any permits, inspections, fees, and any improvements a city thinks is necessary when constructing a school. As such, the City had no authority or ability to condition the construction in any way. And, of course, as no fees were paid to the City, there was no extra money to handle any potential consequences that may arise, as they did, as a result of the new school being in place.

The school got built and, an unanticipated consequence was that children were ending up on 14th in the City limits which created a potential traffic safety issued as a result. It was brought to our attention by a local resident, Mr. Larry Williams, and the Chief, the Mayor, the Public Works Director and I met with Mr. Williams and representatives of the school district on many, many occasions.

The end result was that crosswalks were installed, stop signs were installed, and required handicap improvements were made in August. The City and the school district, neither of which had the money for this work, split the cost and completed the improvements in the name of pedestrian safety.

It was a problem created by a new building in the county, not the City, and created by an agency other than the City. Technically, therefore, the City had to responsibility to make the improvements with City taxpayer funds but did so anyway because of the potential danger to kids.

Questions Asked of the Chief of Police:

Radio Host: Why is it that when a neighbor reports drug dealing next door we hear that the cops did nothing?

Chief of Police: We can't just go kick the door down and arrest people on a report from a neighbor. We have to corroborate what the neighbor has told us by doing our own independent investigation then taking that information to obtain a search warrant. It takes a lot of time. But we need the public to continue to report criminal activity to us, if they don't report it we may not find out any other way.

Radio Host: We occasionally hear complaints such as "Someone stole some of my stuff from my back yard, I found out who did it, I reported it to the Police and they did nothing". What's your take on that?

Chief of Police: When crimes are reported to us we have to do our own independent investigation. A petty theft (under \$900) is a misdemeanor, we cannot arrest on a

misdemeanor not committed in our presence, sometimes if we don't physically arrest the suspect, then citizens think we did nothing. For us to physically take someone into custody for a misdemeanor we have to have the citizen do a citizen's arrest. If we don't arrest the suspect we probably file for the charges through the district attorney's office which takes some time. Also, it is important to note that a citation is considered an arrest and sometimes when a citizen asks for a citizen's arrest we may issue a citation instead of physically taking the suspect into custody.

Radio Host: Why are police officers always sitting at the police station instead of patrolling our city streets?

Chief of Police: Police officers have to document everything they do and a large majority of their time is spent writing reports. An officer may be behind 5 -6 reports at the beginning of his shift so if it looks like they are parked at the Police station doing nothing they are either writing reports, booking evidence, or processing evidence at the station.

October 27, 2011

WHY IS THAT TRUCK PARKED ON 1st STREET?

You may have noticed a utility truck parked against the curb on 1st Street just east of Rabobank. It has been there for a few weeks and is often accompanied by a number of orange traffic cones and other safety barriers.

Work is being performed on a City project known as Hydrocarbon Remediation. Simply put, a private company, under contract to the City, is extracting raw gasoline from groundwater sources at a number of sites within the city.

Many years ago, when Hobsonway served as the main highway between Los Angeles and Phoenix, gas stations dotted the landscape. Back in those days, the stations' underground fuel tanks were constructed of steel and, over time, they all rusted and leaked an enormous amount of raw fuel which then found its way into groundwater.

With funding from the State's Underground Storage Tank Fund, a new company was recently hired by the City Council to find and remove the contamination. The new company, Cal Clean, recently took over from another company that had been under contract for many years, dating back to the mid-1990's.

Thus far, Cal Clean has been very aggressive in tackling the problem and hopes to "close" many of the contaminated sites as quickly as possible. No sites have ever been closed since the program began about 15 years ago so the City is expecting great things from Cal Clean.

October 27, 2011

UPDATE ON PROPOSED RIVERSIDE COUNTY SOLAR FRANCHISE FEE

The last update provided in this forum was on July 5 of this year (scroll down to read that article). At the time, the County was considering adoption of a new policy that would impose a 2%-of-gross fee on solar projects requiring various County approvals. The

purpose of the County fee would be to offset unavoidable, negative impacts as a result of the large projects. During the Board meeting of June 28, 2011 (and even earlier via letter to the County), the City Council went on record in front of the Board of Supervisors opposing any unilaterally-imposed fee that could result in the proposed projects being constructed in other counties or even other states. The Council's rationale was that the thousands of temporary, construction jobs that will be created within the Palo Verde Valley by these projects are too important to risk.

After the aforementioned meeting of the Board of Supervisors held on June 28, 2011, a meeting attended by all council members as well as a number of Blythe residents, it was decided that the County would hold off on a vote of the proposed fee and instead work with the solar industry in an attempt to arrive at a fee schedule that works for both sides. Since that time, a working group of 12 solar companies has met periodically with the County, however as of this date no deal is yet in place.

In an effort to protect the City's interests, the Mayor has attended every negotiating session in Riverside as allowed by Supervisor John Benoit. The Board of Supervisors was scheduled to again consider the franchise fee policy during its meeting of November 1, 2011, however the City was advised earlier this week by the County that the item will be carried over until the Board meeting of November 8, 2011. In the interim, the industry working group and the County will continue to attempt to hammer out a deal.

September 28, 2011

RECAP OF CITY COUNCIL MEETING OF SEPTEMBER 27, 2011

In addition to the more mundane and routine items approved by the City Council during last evening's meeting, the Council also:

1. Authorized the City Manager to sign all documents relating to the Police Department's efforts in pursuing a second Stonegarden grant in the amount of \$189,822. If awarded, the funds will be used for officer overtime, vehicle expenses, and a citywide video surveillance system.
2. Adopted a letter of support of HayDay Farms in the company's attempts to re-release farmland from the Metropolitan Water District.
3. Conducted the first reading of a new ordinance designed to address the inspection and permitting of pawnbrokers and secondhand shops.
4. Approved an Assignment Agreement approving the sale of Palo Verde Valley Disposal Service to CR&R, Inc. By approving the Agreement, the City will receive a one-time fee of \$25,000 as well as an annual payment of \$2,500.
5. Approved a resolution granting a conditional cardroom license to Thomas Farrage, Jr. and Danny A. Figueroa; the license is not site-specific.
6. Approved the Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with three represented employee bargaining units including Clerical/Para-Professional/Recreation, Laborers' Local 1184, and Mid-Management; the MOU's cover the years 2010-2011 and 2011-2012, expiring next June 30.
7. Sitting as the Redevelopment Agency Board of Directors, adopted the Fiscal Year 2011-2012 Budget in the amount of \$16,598,991

September 28, 2011

SOLAR TRUST OF AMERICA CEO ADDRESSES CITY COUNCIL

Mr. Uwe Schmidt, CEO and Chairman of the Board of Solar Trust of America, visited Blythe on September 13, 2011 for the purpose of addressing the City Council during the council meeting held that evening.

Mr. Schmidt, who is based in Cleveland, Ohio, made the journey to Blythe specifically to visit with the council members and public to discuss the delay in his company's solar project. The company, once going by the name Solar Millennium, is planning to build the largest solar plant in the world on BLM land located just northwest of the Blythe Airport.

Visiting dignitaries, including California Governor Jerry Brown and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, attended the project's groundbreaking this past June and construction was expected to commence late this summer.

The company recently announced a delay of approximately 14 months as it has decided to change the technology it will be employ from parabolic trough to photovoltaic. Mr. Schmidt told the City Council that his company is here to stay and is dedicated to the project. The change in technology and resultant delay is due, in part, to the decline in the cost of photovoltaic panels. With a solar field covering approximately 6,000 acres, that will be a lot of cost savings on panels.

During the City Council meeting, the Mayor asked Mr. Schmidt if he would take questions from the audience and he did so very graciously. Earlier in the day, Mr. Schmidt visited radio station KJMB-FM and went on the air specifically to address the construction delay issue and to assure listeners that the project will eventually move ahead. Blythe is eagerly awaiting the beehive of activity that will hit town when the project gets rolling.

September 21, 2011

VOTE BY MAIL: VOTE FIRST, COUNT FIRST!

Did you know that vote by mail ballots are the first to be counted on election night? Once the polls close, the Registrar of Voters may begin counting vote by mail ballots while poll workers close up and get their ballots to the Registrar's office in Riverside. As it takes 3-4 hours for ballots cast in Blythe to make their way to Riverside, the more vote by mail ballots the County has, the faster preliminary results can be released. During the last election most cities in Riverside County had final results by 11:30 p.m. At that time, however, Blythe's ballots had just begun to arrive at the Registrar's office. Any voter can vote by mail. You can opt to vote by mail once or choose to receive all ballots by mail. Vote by mail ballots are mailed to voters up to 29 days prior to Election Day and vote by mail voters are able to check online to verify that the Registrar has received their ballot. Vote by mail ballots can be returned by mail, at a vote by mail drop-off box (there is one in City Hall during every election) or at any polling place in the County on Election Day. Avoid the lines at the polling places and sign up to vote by mail where you can vote first and count first. For more information visit www.voteinfo.net.

Some important dates to remember:

October 11, 2011	First day you can vote
October 24, 2011	Last day you may register to vote in the November Election
November 1, 2011	Last day to request a vote by mail ballot
November 8, 2011	Election Day; polls are open from 7:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.

September 13, 2011

POLICE ACTIVITIES LEAGUE AGAIN SPONSORS SUMMER SWIM PROGRAM

Thanks to the efforts of the Blythe Police Activities League (PAL), the summer swim program was again a resounding success. Just as PAL did last summer, this year it again designed and operated a program through which kids had a place to splash and play during the hot summer days. For this year's 6-week program, PAL provided the following:

- Fundraising efforts
- Lifeguard re-certification
- Community open swim
- Water aerobic and lap swim fitness program
- Swimming lessons provided by American Red Cross trained lifeguards
- Water safety program called "Be cool, swim in a pool"
- Safety equipment including guard buoys, life jackets, and swim lesson equipment
- Aerobic program equipment
- Local swim meet for kids and the community
- Nine limited term jobs
- Radio and newspaper advertising
- All materials for fliers
- Refrigerator for drinks and snacks
- Custodial services
- Hiring and scheduling of pool staff
- Payroll services and workers compensation
- Created the Blythe PAL Desert Dolphins Swim Team that participated in the Imperial Valley League swim meets

Keeping kids out of the canals and teaching them water safety is vitally important in this community and PAL expresses its appreciation to the many donors and volunteers who helped to make this program a success. And the community, in turn, expresses its appreciation to PAL for caring enough about kids to make this program happen again.

August 18, 2011

CITY AND SCHOOL DISTRICT PARTNER FOR CHILD SAFETY

Okay, it's time for the full story and *all* the facts. Very early this year, a local resident noticed a problem with students from the new Appleby School jaywalking across 14th Ave. The resident was understandably concerned for the safety of the kids. He took his problem to the school district which then contacted the City for advice and assistance. A

contingent of City staff, led by the Mayor and including the aforementioned resident, researched the issue and determined the following:

Students were leaving the school from the northeast corner of the campus grounds and heading north on 3rd Street toward 14th Ave. When they arrived at 14th, some of them jaywalked across 14th in a diagonal, northeasterly direction. Existing crosswalks on 14th, which were already in place dating to the time the old Appleby was in use, were apparently of no interest to the kids. In order to use them, they would have had to have walked about 50-100 feet west on 14th, then head north across 14th in the existing crosswalk, and then continue their easterly trek along 14th. But rather than do that, kids being kids simply jaywalked.

While the City looked at all possible remedies, including suggesting that the school district fence an area near the school specifically to keep the kids from walking north on 3rd Street to begin with, the school district asked the City to install stop signs, effectively making for an awkward, 5-way stop intersection. The City replied that an all-way stop could very well be the answer but could not unilaterally install stop signs until a warrant study was commissioned.

A warrant study is a traffic study, conducted by a licensed Traffic Engineer, that looks at all issues potentially affecting an intersection and determines whether or not stop signs are, well, *warranted!* The reason the City needs the study is that it must rely on the advice of trained, licensed engineers to determine whether or not stop signs are, in fact, the right answer. Traffic flow/safety really is a science. Imagine the liability to the City if it unilaterally installed a stop sign and an accident occurred. In court, the judge would ask if the City had conducted a warrant study prior to installing the signs and when the answer was no, it hadn't, the City would be in big trouble. A quick fix that may appear to be common sense to most of us may be the wrong thing to do; trained professionals see and know things the rest of us do not.

The City and school district conducted many, many joint meetings, with the School Superintendent on down (and quite a few of these meetings were held on-site) for the purpose of finding the proper fix. And, of course, with no money in either budget for this particular project, both agencies were particularly challenged in finding a way to make it work, simply for the sake of pedestrian safety. It should also be noted that, contrary to current rumor, the local resident who first brought this issue to the school district's attention was included in a number of these meetings and contributed significantly throughout the entire process. It should also be noted that the City provided an on-site inspection of the problem for a member of the local print media; this media member was clearly up to speed on the issues facing both the school district and the City at the time.

The first hurdle was the cost of the warrant study; how much would it cost and who was going to pay the bill? The City initially advised the school district that a warrant study may cost as much as \$2,500 but committed to getting a written quote. In the interim, both parties continued to discuss ways of funding the project. Early on, the City, again with no money to address a problem that originated in the county (Appleby School is not within

city limits), committed to installing any and all signs that were ultimately determined to be warranted and it also committed to striping the road with crosswalks and other school zone indicators.

The City obtained a very favorable quote on a warrant study from a long-term City partner; it was that firm's experience with the City that resulted in such a favorable quote. The school district retained the firm to conduct the study and the City reiterated that it would perform the physical work and absorb that cost. The study ultimately indicated that two new stop signs would be okay and the City began the work just this past Monday.

As of today, the stop signs are in place and the new crosswalks have been painted as have some additional pavement markings. More signs and markings will follow shortly. Additionally, with school starting next Monday, the Blythe Police Department will deploy resources at the site for the purpose of drawing attention to the new stop signs so that drivers who routinely travel the route during school hours are made aware of the new traffic improvements.

But wait, the law is clear, there is more work to do and more money to spend. Once the City decided to paint new crosswalks, it was then required to install two ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) ramps on the north side of 14th Ave. at the termini of the new crosswalks. These ramps typically cost in excess of \$3,000 each but again, neither agency has the funds for even one. So the agreed-upon fix is that the school district will buy the concrete and the City will perform the work. That work will entail jackhammering out the appropriate sections of the existing sidewalk and then forming and pouring the two ADA-approved, handicap-accessible ramps.

Contrary to additional rumors making the rounds, no one from either agency intentionally dragged their feet and no one from either agency "played politics". Both agencies have rules, regulations, and laws to follow and budgets to administer. This project ended up being a good partnership forged, in part, from the need to fix something that was broken once it was brought to our attention.

As always, if anyone wants to know what is going on with any City project at any time, all they have to do is ask and we'll be happy to provide any information we can.

August 3, 2011

PALO VERDE VALLEY TRANSIT AGENCY TO THE RESCUE!

Here is a great story reflecting that the Desert Roadrunner is far more than just an ideal means of getting from here to there.

On Friday, July 29, 2011, very late in the afternoon, the City's Transit Manager received a call from the California Highway Patrol (CHP), via the Blythe Police Department Dispatch center, requesting assistance for 44 children who were passengers on a private school bus that broke down on Interstate 10 near Wileys Well Road. The CHP was tied up with multiple calls for assistance along I-10 and was also working a major incident near Desert Center. CHP officers transported the children most affected by the extreme

heat to Mesa Drive and had the remaining 35 children move to an underpass a quarter of a mile from the distressed bus.

With normal bus operations coming to a close for the day and staff levels thin due to vacations, a single call out was made and two drivers rushed into action to assist these young passengers in getting to safety. Barely 20 minutes after receiving the call, a cold, refreshing Desert Roadrunner bus was on-scene and transported all remaining children to Blythe. Shortly thereafter, a second bus met the children who had previously been transported to Mesa Drive and drove them to Blythe to be reunited with their group.

Transit agency personnel went above and beyond the call of duty to ensure that the children made it to safety in very harsh weather and boarding conditions. Members of the Valley Baptist Youth Group of Mesa, Arizona were extremely grateful that the safety of their children was of paramount importance even with other major incidents occurring near Blythe.

Members of the City's Palo Verde Valley Transit Agency did this community proud.

July 28, 2011

BLYTHE RECREATION CENTER: STILL OPEN FOR BUSINESS!

Contrary to what you may have heard, the Blythe Recreation Center is open and continues to thrive. The Recreation Center *was* slated to close on July 1, 2009, due to budget constraints, but a grant of \$260,000 from the Community Improvement Fund kept that from happening. Since that time staff has worked diligently to reduce budget expenditures by 40% and increase revenues by 35%. During the July 26, 2011 City Council Meeting, Council adopted the FY 2011/12 Budget which included a fully funded Recreation Center. What this means is that although the City continues to look for additional revenue sources for the long term operation, everyone can breathe a little easier knowing the Center will be open to serve this community another year. The City would like to thank everyone for their support of the Center over the past few years. If you haven't been to the Center lately you definitely need to stop in and visit. You will be amazed at all it has to offer. There are too many events and activities to list here but whatever you might be interested in can probably be found by stopping by 127 S. Main Street. Thanks again for your support and we look forward to seeing you at the Recreation Center!

July 27, 2011

RECENT ACTIONS OF THE BLYTHE CITY COUNCIL

During the City Council meeting of July 26, 2011, the City Council:

1. Received the 4th Quarter Progress Report on the adopted Council Goals & Objectives for fiscal year 2010-2011;
2. Approved the second reading of a new ordinance requiring all liquid waste haulers discharging into the City's designated disposal sites to maintain a Riverside County Department of Environmental Health Liquid Waste Hauler Permit and Decal;

3. Adopted an Urgency ordinance “opting in” to the state’s new requirements affecting Redevelopment Agencies. Without this action, and pursuant to a state budget trailer bill recently signed by the governor (AB 1X 26), Redevelopment Agencies will be dissolved. The purpose for the urgency ordinance, which is good for a period of 45 days (but may be extended one time), was to allow the ordinance to become effective immediately. The Council also conducted the first reading of a permanent ordinance that will eventually replace the urgency ordinance.
4. Accepted the donation from Rail America of the existing railroad crossing equipment currently installed on Hobsonway; the council also accepted the donation from A&K Railroad Materials of 300’ of track still in place immediately south of the Hobsonway crossing.
5. Adopted the fiscal year 2011-2012 Operating and Capital budget, a spending plan totaling \$30,356,079; highlights of the budget include:
 - a. this is the third, consecutive budget that is balanced
 - b. revenue is projected to be up slightly over those of the past three years
 - c. no layoffs or structural deficits are anticipated
 - d. there is no known deficit in future years
 - e. \$2,500 was allocated to the Blythe Fire Department for its annual July 4th fireworks display
 - f. Only *two* of the City’s 27 funds are projected to end the fiscal year in the **red**; this compared to only three short years ago in which *nine* funds ended the year in the **red**

With continued hard work, a little luck, and with the state staying out of the City’s pockets, the budget should get even stronger.

July 22, 2011

RUMOR CONTROL

The City has no knowledge of either a 7-11 convenience store, or a Circle K, to be built on the vacant lot immediately north of Starbucks. Furthermore, there is no truth to the rumor that the City “killed the deal” and sent them away. As far as the City knows, there isn’t any deal of any kind to kill! This is not to say that these stores aren’t considering building there (or elsewhere) and may one day do so, however at this point in time, neither company has contacted the City for any reason. So if they are, in fact, interested in building there, they had better check with City Hall first!

July 22, 2011

BLYTHE RECEIVES LARGE GRANT AWARD FOR CNG STATION

In a June 2, 2011 update of the BlytheBlast!, it was announced that the City of Blythe had applied for grant funding from the Mojave Air Quality Management District for two projects relating to the construction of fueling stations that would dispense compressed natural gas (CNG). The City’s transit agency currently owns two buses (with more to come) powered by CNG that are now fueled through a temporary, trailer-mounted system owned and operated by Hayday Farms.

The City is extremely pleased to announce that, subject to final approval of the Board of Directors of the Mojave Air Quality Management District, one of the two Blythe projects will be funded. More specifically, the Hayday Farms application was approved for funding in the amount of \$312,000! These funds will be used to construct a permanent, joint liquefied natural gas (LNG)/CNG station to fuel not only Hayday's own fleet of trucks and the City's transit buses but also any other vehicles traveling on Interstate 10 that require these types of fuels.

With a total of \$1 million available through the Mojave Air Quality Management District and with 12 total applications received, only 5 projects were funded. It is noteworthy that the Blythe/Hayday application ranked 3rd overall and received the largest of the five cash awards! Once final approval is granted by the District, the City and Hayday Farms will work closely on siting and constructing the new fueling station, most likely to be located near Interstate 10 at the east end of town.

In the interim, the City will continue to pursue construction of its own smaller CNG station, with previously-awarded grant funds, within the City's Public Works yard. This redundant system will help to ensure that the transit district's buses will always have access to CNG.

July 5, 2011

UPDATE ON SOLAR MILLENNIUM PROJECT

After a 17-hour day put in recently by members of the Blythe City Council, it would appear that this project, and the hundreds of jobs it will bring to Blythe, is ready to move forward.

This project, to be constructed northwest of the Blythe Municipal Airport, will be the world's largest of its kind. Using what is known as parabolic trough technology, it will consist of approximately 6,000 acres of mirrors focused on pipes, heating the oil within those pipes, and then creating steam from that heated oil to drive generators.

The project was slated to receive final approval from the County of Riverside on June 7, 2011, however the item was removed from the agenda of the Board of Supervisors that date until the possible imposition of a County franchise fee could be resolved.

The issue was one of the County considering the adoption of a 2%-of-gross franchise fee to be placed on any solar project requiring either an easement from the County or other discretionary approval. According to representatives of Solar Millennium, this fee would have amounted to approximately \$6 million annually for the life of the project, roughly 30 years. Solar Millennium representatives claimed further that this proposed fee took them by surprise and that it was not factored into the project's pro forma. With power

purchase agreements at fixed prices already in place, the company claimed further that there would be no way for it to recoup the \$6 million annually.

The County's intent with imposing the fee is to offset the unavoidable, negative impacts of such a large scale project and that the fee was discussed as far back as February. The County indicated further that franchise fees date back to 1913 and are not unusual.

Prior to this issue being revisited by the County Board of Supervisors on June 28, 2011, the City Council met in a special meeting on June 22, 2011 and voted unanimously to oppose the fee. Although the project will not be located within City limits and is therefore not subject to any entitlements that could be granted by the City, the City Council took the position of opposing the fee because it was concerned that Solar Millennium could pull out. The Council did not want the new fee to cause the project to move to another county or even another state.

All five members of the City Council traveled to Riverside on June 28, 2011 for the purpose of attending the meeting of the Board of Supervisors. A few of them left Blythe at 6:00 a.m., and did not return home until 11:00 p.m., so that they could hear every word of the discussion in the Board Chambers. Early in the discussion, Supervisor John Benoit proposed a series of amendments to the franchise fee, one of which would exempt the Solar Millennium project from the fee because the project was all but entitled.

More than 50 people spoke during the Board meeting, including Mayor DeConinck and Councilmen Contreras and Patel, a vast majority of whom spoke against the proposed fee. The end result was that Solar Millennium was exempted from the new County franchise fee. Additionally, the Board of Supervisors decided to commission a study for the purpose of developing a fair fee to be imposed on future projects.

June 20, 2011

NEW SHADE STRUCTURES FOR CITY HALL PARKING LOT

There is some construction activity going on in the City Hall parking lot right now. City crews are installing new shade structures for employee and visitor parking. The structures were purchased years ago with bond proceeds acquired for construction of City Hall but were never erected. The material has been sitting in the Public Works yard all this time but will be up soon, hopefully in time to provide shade for a majority of the summer.

June 20, 2011

CITY COUNCIL ACTIONS OF THE MEETING OF JUNE 14, 2011

During the City Council meeting of June 14, 2011, the Council took the following actions:

- Approved the Fireworks display request of the Blythe Volunteer Fire Department for its annual July 4th fireworks show.
- Approved two requests for the sale and display of fireworks of the Blythe Social Club and Tony & Patricia Ojeda and the First Assembly of God.

- Delayed the second reading of Ordinance No. 849-2011 approving a zone change for the Neighbors RV Park and Commercial Center until the City Council meeting of June 28, 2011.
- Approved a motion to “Reconsider” the prior approval (Council meeting of May 24, 2011) of the Neighbors RV Park and Commercial Center; the item will be heard again during the City Council meeting of June 28, 2011.
- Approved the annual assessments for Lighting Districts Nos. 1 and 2; agreed to consider a request by the Fairway Villas at Mesa Bluffs Homeowners Association allowing it to assume responsibility for the landscape maintenance in that zone.
- Approved a resolution calling for a general municipal election for November 8, 2011 for the purpose of conducting a City Council election for the seats currently held by Carie Covell and Richard Contreras.
- Approved a Memorandum of Understanding with Hull Farms and the Michael J. Farrage and Cindy K. Farrage Trust for future real estate negotiations relating to the proposed Visitors Park on Interstate 10; this action was needed in advance of an application to the state of California for more than \$1,000,000 in grant funds for construction of the Visitors Park.
- Approved participation in a joint chip seal program with Riverside County for portions of 6th Ave. and 10th Ave.
- Approved contract documents for the rehabilitation of the college water reservoir.

June 6, 2011

A PERIODIC REVIEW OF SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE CITY OF BLYTHE

This is a topic that merits periodic review as we tend to forget what services the City does (and doesn't) provide. A question at times seems to be, “Why doesn't the City just serve as all things to all people?” The thinking seems to be that it's big, powerful, bureaucratic, it takes in a lot of taxpayer money, and it's a hundred miles from anywhere. Surely the City can solve all the problems of the region including those of the schools, the hospital, the college, local businesses, and the unemployed.

This is not true. Blythe is a “General Law” city which means that it may exercise its powers only as specifically outlined in State law. This is in contrast to a Charter City which has a broader range of powers that are locally guided by a Charter adopted by the city's electorate. Just for reference, 357 of the state's 477 cities are general law cities whereas 120 are charter cities.

The City is a stand-alone, unit of local government that is charged with specific activities as spelled out in a series of laws known collectively as the Blythe Municipal Code (BMC). The BMC consists of ordinances which, in very basic terms, are laws. That's right, the City Council adopts and enforces laws.

The City also adopts proclamations which are nothing more than “feel good” instruments, and resolutions which are technical tools for getting City work done. Ordinances, however, are laws. These laws are considered “enabling legislation”, something the City needs before it can undertake an activity. If the enabling legislation doesn't exist, typically in either state law or the BMC, the City pretty much can't engage in whatever activity is being discussed.

Some things the City is NOT? It is not, nor is it responsible for: Palo Verde Hospital, Riverside County (e.g. Sheriff, County Fire, District Attorney, courts, etc.), Palo Verde College, the State of California, Palo Verde Irrigation District, Palo Verde Unified School District, special districts, utility companies, banks, service clubs, the Blythe Area Chamber of Commerce, the cemetery district, the Colorado River Country Fair, the California Highway Patrol, the Department of Motor Vehicles, the U.S. Border Patrol, and the Community Improvement Fund (CIF).

Each of these organizations has its own board, commission, council, or other guiding body, its own chief executive officer, its own budget, and its own set of bylaws similar to the BMC. They each do their thing and the City does its. Not only is the City NOT these things, it CANNOT be without the aforementioned enabling legislation. Monies of these agencies are generally not commingled and, with very few exceptions, this means that City taxpayer dollars cannot be used for the programs or projects of those other agencies.

So what services does the City provide? Within a very specific, geographically-defined area (rare exceptions notwithstanding) of approximately 23 square miles, the City provides Police, fire, water, sewer, streets, parks, planning/zoning, animal control, building inspection, code enforcement, golf course, recreation, and redevelopment.

Inasmuch as the City is a business, it also includes the infrastructure needed to run any business including personnel/payroll, finance (general ledger, budget, accounts payable, accounts receivable, investments, etc.), risk management, building maintenance, central garage, legal counsel, and administration.

Here are some interesting city and county statistics:

- As stated above, there are 477 cities in California
- California has 58 counties
- Nationwide, there are 3,140 counties and 19,350 cities
- San Bernardino County is the largest (in area) in the contiguous, 48 states
- The City of Los Angeles is the most populous in California at 10,400,000
- The City of Amador has the smallest population in California at 209
- Alpine County has the smallest population in California at 1,201
- Riverside County has 27 cities and a population of 2.1 million
- The City of Indian Wells has the smallest population in Riverside County at 5,100
- The City of Riverside is the most populous in Riverside County at 300,000

June 2, 2011

CITY APPLIES FOR ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR ALTERNATIVE FUELING STATION

The City has submitted a grant application to the Mojave Air Quality Management District with the hope of being awarded an additional \$108,000 for the construction of a compressed natural gas (CNG) fueling station.

The City's transit agency was awarded grant funds a number of years ago and, through a partnership with local Hayday Farms, had intended on jointly constructing a CNG fueling station. The transit agency owns two CNG-fueled buses, and intends to acquire more, however there is no local availability of CNG. Hayday Farms owns a fleet of trucks that use liquefied natural gas (LNG) and fuels its trucks from a trailer-mounted tank located here in Blythe. With a compressor added to the mix, CNG is created and the transit agency's buses can be fueled.

A number of circumstances, however, including insufficient funds, precluded construction of the permanent station but renewed talks have seemingly found a way to make it work. The City's interest, by the way, has an economic development component to it, that being to lure CNG-fueled trucks off Interstate 10 and have the drivers buy fuel here in Blythe.

The City, Hayday Farms, and Mojave Air Quality are all interested in seeing the construction of this permanent CNG fueling station. Although the reasons differ, the end result will be the same so all have partnered in the grant application process. Funds are being sought not only to help Hayday Farms construct a permanent station, but also the aforementioned \$108,000 to add to the City's existing funding for constructing a second, smaller CNG station within the City's Public Works yard specifically to fuel the transit buses. Having redundant systems locally will help to ensure that the transit agency's two current (and future) buses will always have access to this cleaner-burning, alternative fuel. The City hopes to hear back on its grant application by mid-summer.

May 27, 2011

ALL VESTIGES OF RAILROAD TO DISAPPEAR SHORTLY

Take a last look at any railroad tracks and signs you see in Blythe and the entire Palo Verde Valley; it will all be gone by summer.

A few years ago, Rail America petitioned the Surface Transportation Board (STB) for the right to abandon the 49-mile stretch of rail line that ran from Rice to Ripley, right through the heart of Blythe. The City, together with a number of concerned business owners, fought the abandonment. In the end, however, the STB sided with Rail America.

Although the STB decision was handed down last year, the tracks and signs remained in place. As long as they remained, there was always hope, however slim, that the rail line could be re-established one day.

About two weeks ago, however, crews from A&K Railroad Materials, Inc., came to town to begin the removal process. A&K bought the materials from Rail America for the scrap value which is currently very high. As an example, a 39' piece of 110-pound track (in this example, 110 pounds is the weight of every three feet of track) currently sells for \$575. A 33' piece of 90-pound track sells for \$500.

Conventional wisdom says that once the track is gone, it will never come back as it would be cost-prohibitive. Two examples: Each *foot* of new track costs \$100 and each new railroad tie costs \$45.

On a final note, the City is still working with A&K, Rail America, and Assemblyman Manuel Perez in an attempt to secure some of the equipment and track for historical purposes. Can't you just picture a restored engine or rail car sitting upon some original track in downtown Blythe?

Visit the City's Facebook page to see some final pictures of the tracks, signs, lights, and arms that will soon be gone.

May 26, 2011

CITY COUNCIL ACTIONS OF MAY 24, 2011

The following are a few actions taken by the City Council during the regular meeting of May 24, 2011:

1. Approved a critical component of the environmental review required for the proposed sewer installation project on Mesa Bluffs; this approval brings the project closer to reality.
2. Accepted a donation from the County of Riverside, in the amount of \$213,000, as all matching funds required for the Roberti-Z'Berg-Harris state parks bond grant that will make infrastructure improvements to Quechan Park and Marina.
3. Concurred with the County of Riverside's request to cancel the Fire Service Agreements for the provision of services to various annexed areas of the city; the services will terminate effective June 30, 2011. The City's volunteer fire department will continue to provide the required services.
4. Approved various steps needed by a developer for development of a recreational vehicle park to be located at the southeast corner of the intersection of Hobsonway and Neighbours Blvd. It is anticipated that this park, and others, will be needed to accommodate the influx of construction workers expected in conjunction with the Solar Millennium solar project that will be constructed northwest of the Blythe Airport.
5. Approved an agreement with the County of Riverside for design of the proposed Hobsonway/Riviera Drive I-10 Improvement Project. This is the first step toward eventually constructing a Visitors Park in the area with the goal being to entice westbound drivers entering from Arizona to exit the freeway and spend some time and money in Blythe.
6. Authorized the Vice Mayor to begin implementing a Youth Government Council, utilizing recently-awarded grant funds, that will work with local young people as they prepare to be tomorrow's leaders.
7. Sitting as the Redevelopment Agency Board of Directors, the council members approved repairs to the Birch Street water reservoir and water production facility on Murphy Street.

Staff also reported to the City Council that cleanup of the old Ice Plant on Main Street was progressing and appears to be on schedule. The goal is to have it completely cleaned up before visitors arrive for the busy July 4th holiday.

May 26, 2011

MORE TECHNICAL PROBLEMS WITH ELECTRONIC MESSAGE SIGN

Just as soon as one technical problem was fixed, another has appeared. The City thanks you for your patience as it continues to work out the bugs!

May 11, 2011

CLEAN UP OF ICE PLANT BURNOUT BEGINS TODAY!

After a very long time, the burned-out eyesore that was once the Ice House on North Main Street will finally be cleaned up! The historic building burned to the ground on April 1, 2009; the City has been trying to force the owner (the City does not own the site) to clean it up but has met with resistance.

Contrary to popular belief that the City “is doing nothing” with the site, the City has worked long and hard behind the scenes to get it cleaned up. It finally took court action to get the issue resolved and the owner has agreed to a strict timetable for the cleanup.

The demolition permit was issued by the City today and the contractor began work today as well. Look for the site to be cleaned up shortly! The City thanks the community for its patience in getting to this point.

May 10, 2011

EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO EAST BLYTHE SHOOTING INCIDENT

There is yet another false rumor making the rounds around town claiming that Blythe police officers took too long to respond to the scene of the shooting at a bar in East Blythe. Some reports are claiming that it took the Blythe Police Department 15 minutes to arrive whereas yet other inaccurate reports say that Blythe Ambulance took too long to respond. On this particular night, the Blythe Police Department had nine (9) police officers on duty. The FACTS are as follows:

BLYTHE POLICE DEPARTMENT

12:50 a.m. Call received and dispatched at the same time
12:52 a.m. Officers Ley, Burt, and Jones arrived on scene
12:53 a.m. Officers requested expedited response from Blythe Ambulance
1:03 a.m. Officer Adams advised he was following medics to Blythe Airport

BLYTHE AMBULANCE

12:53 a.m. Dispatched
12:55 a.m. Enroute
12:58 a.m. Arrived on scene
1:03 a.m. Enroute to airport

While this incident was tragic, Blythe’s emergency responders did a commendable job getting to the scene quickly.

May 10, 2011

CLARIFICATION OF OPERATION STONEGARDEN

There is apparently some misunderstanding around town regarding a current police action funded through a new federal grant. More specifically, the City has heard a few negative comments regarding Blythe police officers supposedly “wasting their time sitting at the Port of Entry when they should be protecting the City instead”.

The officers seen at the Port of Entry are doing exactly as required by the new grant which is known as “Stonegarden” (see BlytheBlast! update of April 18). Requirements are to patrol areas of ingress and egress from the Mexico Border specifically looking for smugglers; officers are to target highways and desert trails. So if you see Blythe police officers at the Port of Entry, they are paid by the federal government (not City taxpayers) to be there and are doing their jobs. Rest assured the required number of officers are still protecting the city as usual.

May 3, 2011

BUDGET CONFUSION FROM CLOSURE OF COUNTY FIRE STATION

During the City Council meeting of April 26, 2011, representatives of CalFire advised the City Council that County Fire Station 43 is likely to close early this summer. As part of the presentation, it was noted that the County needs \$550,000 to remain open. There is some confusion over that sum of money and what spending it would accomplish. It would seem that some people think that the City now has the option of contracting for citywide fire services and such services will cost only \$550,000. This is incorrect.

The \$550,000 needed by the County would maintain the status quo, nothing else. With that amount of money, Station 43 would remain open and primarily continue to serve the needs of residents within the unincorporated areas, not the core of the city (mutual aid and separate annexation agreements notwithstanding).

In simpler terms, nothing would change other than the City would be out \$550,000 per year (which it does not have) and would have to continue to fund its own volunteer department.

What was not discussed in any detail during the council meeting was the cost to the City should the City Council desire to contract with the County for citywide services; that cost would be \$1,250,000. The existing, City Volunteer Fire Department currently costs the City less than \$400,000 per year and the service is exemplary.

April 27, 2011

FISCAL AUDITOR PRAISES CITY BUDGET AGAIN!

In the Blythe Blast! update of April 20, we informed you that the City’s fiscal auditor released his findings of the fiscal year 2009-2010 budget audit. Those findings included a positive fund balance of \$567,000. Rich Teaman, of Teaman, Ramirez, and Smith, made a formal presentation on the subject to the City Council during the meeting of April 26, 2011. Although he stressed that the City’s General Fund is still over \$2 million in the red,

he was quick to point out the significant progress of the past two years. His comments included:

1. "We have issued an 'Unqualified' opinion which is the highest level of opinion"
2. "This is the largest, positive gain in the General Fund since 2002"
3. "We're encouraged, this is the first positive change in quite awhile"

With the continuing deficit, however, the General Fund still has a long way to go before it is out of the woods but the auditor added that the City is clearly on the right track.

April 27, 2011

CITY COUNCIL ACTIONS OF APRIL 26, 2011

Among the actions taken by the City Council during its regular meeting of April 26, 2011 were the following:

1. Approved an agreement with the State Franchise Tax Board whereby the City and the state will exchange business license information. The agreement will help to ensure a level playing field in which all businesses will obtain required business licenses. The City regularly receives complaints from business owners about others not being licensed and this reciprocal agreement with the state should help with their concerns.
2. Approved an agreement with The Holt Group to perform the environmental review required in advance of the installation of the culvert pipe in the levee separating Quechan Marina from the Colorado River.

April 27, 2011

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CITY ON ADDITIONAL WEBSITES

While the City has its own website (www.cityofblythe.ca.gov), it should be noted that some individual City operations maintain their own sites as well. To learn more about various City services, please feel free to visit the following websites:

Fire Department:	blythefire.com
Golf Course:	blythegolfcourse.com
Transit Agency:	pvvta.com

April 27, 2011

ELECTRONIC MESSAGE SIGN GROWING PAINS

You may have noticed that the sign has been difficult to read of late. It was installed in November of last year and worked very well for the first couple of months and then began experiencing the problems you see now. The sign manufacturer, installer, and the City's computer people are all working on a fix and it has not yet been determined if the problem is hardware or software. The City thanks you for your patience as it works to correct the problem. But the good part? The sign is under warranty until 2014!

April 27, 2011

FLAGS IN CITY PARKS

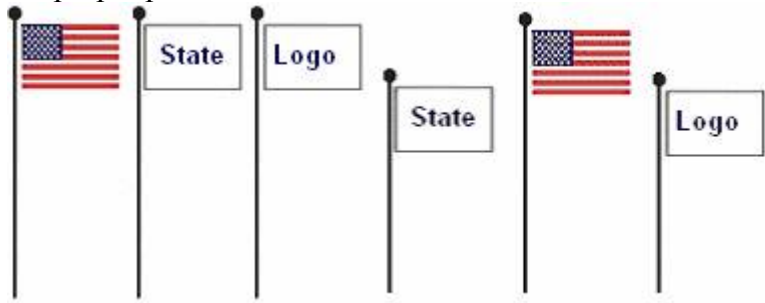
With the recent addition of the POW/MIA flag to the set of three flagpoles in Gateway Park, some confusion has arisen over the proper placement of the flags. The City

originally raised the U.S. Flag on the center pole because it is the tallest pole. A couple of community organizations, however, contacted the City and advised that the U.S. Flag should be placed on its own right (to the viewer's left). For the past few weeks, therefore, the flag has been in that position. On further review, however, it was determined that the City's original placement was correct; the U.S. Flag belongs on the tallest pole when multiple poles are present. The following excerpt from the U.S. Flag Code was taken from the American Legion website:

§ 7. Position and manner of display

(c) No other flag or pennant should be placed above or, if on the same level, to the right of the flag of the United States of America

The City thanks those who took the time to notice the array of flags and to comment on the proper placement.



April 25, 2011

POLICE ACTIVITIES LEAGUE AWARDED GRANT FOR YOUTH PROGRAM

The Blythe Police Activities League (PAL) has been awarded an \$8,768 grant by The Community Foundation. The funds will help to provide the youth of the Palo Verde Valley with training and leadership skills so they can form their own council and share their ideas and concerns with the City of Blythe Government. The program will teach youth how to organize projects, how to communicate and listen effectively, team building, and public speaking. The grant period will be May 1, 2011 through April 30, 2012. Contact Valerie Hudson or Pam Bush at the Police Department for more details

April 25, 2011

NOTHING FOR KIDS TO DO IN BLYTHE. REALLY?

In response to those who continue to claim that Blythe offers few or no activities for kids, the City offers the following for consideration:

1. Little League
2. Flag football
3. Pop Warner football
4. Soccer League
5. City Recreation Center
 - a. basketball
 - b. volleyball
 - c. racquetball
 - d. indoor activities

- camps
- boxing
- crafts

- e. summer outdoor activities

6. Police Activities League
7. Bowling alley
8. Blythe Fitness
9. Fishing in the canals
10. Hunting (with adult supervision)
11. River activities
 - a. fishing
 - b. swimming
 - c. boating
 - d. skiing
12. Martial arts studio
13. Boy Scouts/Cub Scouts
14. Girl Scouts
15. Skate park
16. Summer pool
17. City and County parks
 - a. ballfields
 - b. playground equipment
18. Desert activities
 - a. ATV riding
 - b. motorcycle riding
 - c. hiking
 - d. camping
19. 18-hole golf course with youth rates
20. Bike riding
21. Archery Club
22. Interact club
23. 4-H club
24. FFA
25. Skateboarding
26. Part time/summer jobs
27. School activities
28. Hobbies
29. Read/visit the library
30. Collect bottles and cans for the recycling value
31. Volunteer to help an elderly neighbor plant a garden
32. Volunteer at a church
33. Take guitar lessons
34. Care for a pet
35. Build a model airplane
36. Build a go-cart
37. Do chores and homework

- 38. Movie on the Green
- 39. Sandlot baseball
- 40. Sandlot football
- 41. Cheerleading
- 42. Dance studios
- 43. Church groups

April 20, 2011

STOP THE PRESSES! CITY BUDGET MAKES HUGE GAIN!

The City's outside, fiscal auditor has just advised the City that the outcome of the fiscal year 2009-2010 audit was another positive fund balance, this time to the tune of \$567,000! This is huge news and it is the first time since 2003 that the City has had two, consecutive years of positive fund balances! With a \$287,000 savings identified in the 2008-2009 audit, the two-year, combined total of approximately \$854,000 to the good means that the financial hole has shrunk from \$3.4 million in 2008 to \$2.55 million today. Still a very large, negative number, but the positive trend cannot be ignored! And all this during what is arguably the worst economy since the Great Depression!

April 19, 2011

RECAP OF CITY POSITIONS LOST

Dating back to the fall of 2008 when the City's severe budget problem first surfaced, the City has lost 36 staff members to layoffs, retirements, and other separations. Those losses, as a percentage of the beginning totals within each bargaining unit, were as follows:

Management:	60% (10 original positions, 4 today)
Laborers:	55% (31 original positions, 14 today)
Mid-Management:	48% (21 original positions, 11 today)
Clerical/Recreation:	23% (13 original positions, 10 today)

There seems to be a misconception that Management was somehow "spared" during the layoffs. As these numbers clearly indicate, the pain was spread throughout City Hall with Management taking the biggest hit.

April 19, 2011

RECAP OF BUDGET REDUCTIONS

It should be noted that the City has drastically reduced its budget in the three years since the severe budget problem became known. The adopted General Fund budget in Fiscal Year 2008-2009 was \$11,809,224; the amount adopted last summer for the current fiscal year was \$9,658,436. This reduction of \$2,150,788 equates to an overall reduction of 18% (22% when a one-time grant of \$500,000 is removed from the equation). The overall City budget between Fiscal Year 2008-2009 and the current year has been reduced by \$5,429,756, or 15%. Notable reductions include:

<u>Department</u>	<u>2008-2009</u>	<u>Today</u>	<u>Reduction</u>
Recreation Center	\$ 540,600	\$ 249,018	54%
City Manager Department	\$ 354,032	\$ 178,953	49%

Development Services Dept.	\$1,028,747	\$ 632,725	38%
City Council	\$ 82,178	\$ 66,219	19%
Police Department	\$5,107,994	\$4,600,472	10%

Additionally, actual expenses have also been managed extremely well. As an example, the total overtime expended within the Police Department for fiscal years 2009-2010 and 2008-2009 was \$182,967 whereas for the two years prior to that (2007-2008 and 2006-2007) the total was \$476,115. This represents a phenomenal drop of 62%.

April 18, 2011

NEW POLICE DEPARTMENT GRANTS

“OPERATION STONEGARDEN”

The Blythe Police Department is very proud to announce that OPERATION STONEGARDEN (OPSG) is up and running within the City of Blythe and Riverside County. The focus of the operation will be to increase law enforcement presence in areas identified through intelligence information as "high-entry" points and routes of egress used by narcotic smuggling and human trafficking organizations, or as central transportation hubs. Through the enforcement of the California Penal Code, Stonegarden officers will act as a second tier of Homeland Security, thereby allowing for increased police presence and further allowing the Police and Sheriff to patrol in a proactive manner in collaboration with the United States Border Patrol-Yuma Sector. This operation is fully funded by the federal government with the City's portion of the grant being \$198,000. The City will also obtain a new vehicle and a license plate reader through this grant.

“SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL”

The federal Safe Routes to School Grant Program has awarded the Blythe Police Department a grant that will greatly improve the safety of our children as travel to and from school. As a supplement to the current safety education efforts of the Blythe Police Department, a program entitled “It's cool to walk to school” will be instituted in our community. The Safe Routes to School grant funds will provide:

1. Education- Grade level appropriate curriculum will teach students in grades K through 8 bicycle and pedestrian safety. A School Resources Officer, along with a Community Services Officer, will hold assemblies and classroom forums.
2. Encouragement- The Walking School Bus program will encourage parents to walk their children to school as opposed to driving them. This will lessen the vehicle traffic congestion that is currently the norm before and after school.
3. Enforcement- The zones around the schools will have new signage that alert drivers to their current speed and the posted limit. There will be increased patrol during peak hours and aggressive and dangerous drivers will be cited.
4. Safety- A bicycle helmet program will be included in the school assembly programs.

April 18, 2011

LIGHT FIXTURE RETROFIT

In an effort to save money on electric bills, last year the City partnered with Southern California Edison (SCE) in a program through which the latter conducted an energy usage audit. At no cost to the City, SCE inspected the light fixtures at all City buildings and recommended that all be replaced with more energy-efficient units. With no money in the budget for such a project, the City applied for, and was awarded, a grant through the state in the amount of \$129,704. The retrofit is occurring right now and the lights are not only cheaper to operate, they are more efficient in the amount of light they provide.

April 18, 2011

NEW RIDING MOWERS TO BE PURCHASED

During the City Council meeting of April 12, 2011, the Council approved the purchase of two, 72" John Deere riding mowers. These new pieces of equipment will be used to mow the many acres of grass at the City's numerous, public parks. There will be no fiscal impact to the current fiscal year's budget as the mowers will be purchased through proceeds of the City auction of surplus equipment that was conducted on March 18, 2011.

April 18, 2011

NO MORE SMELL!

During the Blythe Redevelopment Agency meeting of April 12, 2011, the Board approved the lease of five odor scrubbers to be used at the following sewer lift stations:

Sewer lift # 3, Del Taco – 129 S. Lovekin

Sewer lift # 5, City Yard – 490 S. Main

Sewer lift # 11, Intake – 392 S. Intake

Sewer lift # 13, PV Oasis – 2128 Sparkling Lagoon

Sewer lift # 14, Sixth Ave – 6200 Defrain Blvd

Using advanced technology, the new scrubbers will be 50% more effective against odors.

April 18, 2011

REVENUE ENHANCEMENT FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The City, through a partnership with Riverside County, has identified a new source of revenue to be used to partially offset expenses of the City's Economic Development division. The City will receive \$35,000 from the federal Community Development Block Grant program via Riverside County's Economic Development Agency.

April 18, 2011

ICE PLANT UPDATE

It has been more than two years since the old ice plant on Main Street burned to the ground and yes, the big pile of rubble remains. While the City does not own the property, it has been requiring the owner of the site to clean it up, however the issue has been winding its way through the County court system for quite awhile. Indications are that there may be a resolution sometime this summer. Rest assured that the City is doing all it can to get the eyesore cleaned up!

April 18, 2011

PROPOSITION 84 GRANT APPLICATION, SUNRISE PARK

The City of Blythe, along with Riverside County Transportation and Caltrans, have partnered in an effort to close the current Riviera Drive exit off westbound Interstate 10. This off ramp would be relocated a mile further west to a safer location and will continue to provide access to Hobsonway as well as provide an opportunity for another City park. California State parks offers a competitive grant program that places an emphasis on new parks in under-served areas of communities.

The City of Blythe intends to apply for this funding in an effort to provide a new look to the entrance of our community and state. This proposed park will provide restrooms and picnic areas for travelers and the community. Other possible amenities include a dog run or dog park, a playground, and information kiosks that will list community activities and general information. Along with these amenities, a new and safer “Welcome to California” sign has been proposed, thus eliminating the dangerous practice of parking along the shoulder for photo opportunities. Community members should have a voice in the project and will be given an opportunity to express their opinions in a series of public input meetings to be held on the following dates:

May 10, 2011

May 26, 2011

June 14, 2011

All meetings will be held at City Hall beginning at 5:00 p.m.

April 14, 2011

CITY BUDGET CONTINUES TO MAKE DRAMATIC IMPROVEMENTS!

The condition of the City’s General Fund budget, which has been mired in a deep, multi-million dollar hole since 1998, continues to improve significantly. During the City Council meeting of January 25, 2011, outside fiscal auditor Rich Teaman of Teaman, Ramirez, and Smith presented to the Council his firm’s findings for the fiscal year 2008-2009 audit. Mr. Teaman advised the Council that the year ended with a positive fund balance of \$287,000! Considering that the three, previous years, as well as six of the last ten, all ended in red ink, this was a dramatic turnaround. Said Mr. Teaman, “Whatever you’ve been doing, keep it up!”

April 14, 2011

MORE POSITIVE BUDGET NEWS

During the City Council meeting of February 22, 2011, staff presented its mid-year budget review. With a fiscal year beginning July 1 of each year, a mid-year report has been presented each of the last three years for the purpose of advising the Council and informing the public as to the condition of the budget in each of those years. This year’s news was good; although the City still has very little disposable income, the budget is stable. Unlike many other cities, counties, and school districts throughout California, Blythe does not have a budget problem nor is one anticipated for the foreseeable future. While other agencies are scrambling to balance their budgets with projected deficits and looming layoffs, Blythe is not anticipating any such problems. It should be noted,

however, that with the state's continuing budget problems, anything can happen. It has a history of raiding the coffers of cities and counties and until the state balances its own budget, the City could again be a target.

April 14, 2011

CITY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES UPDATE

The City has made tremendous strides towards achieving the four goals and objectives adopted by the City Council in 2010. Those goals, in order, included:

1. Continue to work toward financial stability
2. Begin work on an economic development strategy
3. Begin development of Quechan Park/Marina
4. Begin work on developing a Visitors' Park on Interstate 10

As discussed immediately above, the City is certainly on the right track with pursuit of *financial stability*. The *economic development strategy* is taking shape with more than 60 community stakeholders invited to submit input into a plan that will help to improve the community's financial well being. Two stakeholder meetings were held in March. The City recently approved a contract with the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) for design of a culvert pipe to be installed in the levee that separates the Colorado River from *Quechan Marina*; the pipe will help to keep the marina flushed out and cleaner. Additional projects will include a new restroom, entrance paving, and covered picnic areas. The *Visitors' Park* is slated to be located on westbound interstate 10 just west of the inspection station. Through a partnership with Riverside County, new highway off-and on-ramps are being designed to allow access to the new visitors' park. Overall progress on these four goals and objectives has been swift and steady and there is no sign of that progress letting up!

April 14, 2011

"SECRET" CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS?

Simply put, they don't exist in Blythe. Forget about what you may have heard elsewhere, there are no secret City Council meetings in Blythe. There is currently one rumor making the rounds claiming that the Council held a "secret" study session on March 15, 2011, ostensibly to force a tax increase upon Blythe residents. An additional part of the rumor said that the council voted to cancel that meeting because of its "secret" status. None of that is true.

The Study Session was noticed properly as required by the open meeting law in California known as the Brown Act. It was also advertised on the electronic message sign on Hobsonway which, at 20 feet in height, is anything but secret! Furthermore, the study session was not canceled, it was held (the Deputy City Attorney was present) with all five council members and many staff members in attendance. One council member made a motion to cancel the meeting but that motion lost on a 3-2 vote and the meeting continued to its intended conclusion.

April 14, 2011

AND SPEAKING OF TAX INCREASES....

First and foremost, the City Council CANNOT unilaterally raise or impose ANY taxes. Please read that line again. Another rumor around town right now is that the City Council is attempting to raise your taxes. Again, that is unequivocally false. Thanks to Proposition 218 of 1996, only you, the voter, can raise or impose taxes. The California Property Tax Information website specifically states:

“In November 1996, California voters passed Proposition 218, the ‘Right to Vote on taxes Act’. This constitutional amendment protects taxpayers by limiting the methods by which local governments can create or increase taxes, fees and charges without taxpayer consent. Proposition 218 requires voter approval prior to imposition or increase of general taxes, assessments, and certain user fees”.

Please visit the website to read for yourself how Proposition 218 protects us all from tax increases that we, the voters, did not approve. That website can be accessed at www.californiataxdata.com/pdf/Proposition218.pdf.

So with the protections of Proposition 218 in place, what, exactly, has the City Council been discussing? The only power the City Council has in this regard is deciding whether or not to place tax questions on the ballot. That’s it, nothing more. Again, the only thing the City Council can do is to provide voters the opportunity to decide for themselves whether or not taxes should be raised or new taxes imposed.

Placing a tax measure on a ballot requires a minimum of four votes from the City Council; if four or more council members vote “aye”, then the item(s) will be placed on a ballot for us to vote on. If only three or fewer vote “aye”, then there will be no public vote. It’s that simple!

The reason for the current discussions is that there will be a general election in November of this year which means that it will cost little or nothing for the City to add issues to that already-scheduled election. It takes a lot of time and effort to get something on the ballot so if Blythe is going to do it, now is the time to start.

With all of the foregoing in mind, the following taxes have been discussed recently:

Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) – This is also known as the “motel tax” and the “bed tax”. It is levied on anyone who rents a motel room within the City of Blythe. The current rate is 10%. In 2009, the City placed before the voters the concept of increasing this tax to 13% but the effort failed by 109 votes, 980-871 (53% to 47%). Had it passed, one-third of the new revenue (estimated at the time to have been \$90,000) would have gone to the Blythe Area Chamber of Commerce for tourist promotion while the remaining \$180,000 would have been retained by the City.

Sales Tax – As anyone who buys anything in Blythe knows, the current sales tax rate is 8.75% (this rate includes a 1% increase imposed by the state in the spring of 2009, ostensibly for a two-year period). There is often a misconception in cities about the amount of this tax rate that is retained by local government. In this case, the City of

Blythe receives only 1% of the 8.75%. The balance goes to the state, the County, and to special taxes such as Measure M in Riverside County. It is estimated that a 1% increase in the sales tax would generate approximately \$1.5 million for the City.

Utility Users Tax – This would be an entirely new tax for Blythe although it is used extensively throughout California. Currently, 146 cities and 4 counties levy this tax and it is estimated that approximately one-half of all California residents pay this tax. It is a tax on anyone consuming utilities such as electricity, natural gas, water, sewer, sanitation, telephone, and cable television. For the sake of discussion, a 1% tax on electricity usage would generate approximately \$138,000 for the City and add \$1.23 to the average, monthly residential SCE bill in Blythe. A 1% tax on natural gas would generate \$16,000 for the City and add approximately 23 cents to the average, monthly residential bill. A water/sewer/sanitation tax of 1% would generate \$6,000 for the City and add approximately 90 cents to the average, monthly residential bill.

In summary, YOU, the voter, and NOT the City Council, have the final say on whether or not taxes are increased or new taxes imposed.

A final word on this topic; during the City Council meeting of April 12, 2011, the Council decided against placing any tax measures on the November ballot for voter consideration.

April 14, 2011

NEW APPLEBY PARK PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT OPENS

There is now brand new playground equipment at Appleby Park! Not to be confused with the new equipment at Appleby Elementary School, the equipment in Appleby Park was purchased and installed by the City last month. The \$100,000 project was funded by the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. These funds filter through the state, then through Riverside County, and are finally used by the City. Up next for Appleby Park will be a brand new restroom! Watch for more exciting improvements in the near future.

April 14, 2011

TODD PARK EXERCISE EQUIPMENT AND NEW SHADE STRUCTURE

If you haven't been by Todd Park recently, take a look at the new exercise equipment installed in March. There are six stations along Broadway and two on Barnard Street. Also new in Todd Park are replacement shade structures covering the existing playground equipment. Come by and get fit!

April 14, 2011

HOBSONWAY BEAUTIFICATION

You have probably noticed the City's Public Works employees sprucing up Hobsonway recently. More specifically, additional decorative rock is being placed in the areas

between the sidewalks and the curbs. The north side has been completed as has approximately one-half of the south side.

April 14, 2011

TRANSIT AGENCY PERFORMANCE AUDIT

The Palo Verde Valley Transit Agency (PVVTA) has just received final State Transportation Development Act (TDA) fiscal and performance audits for the triennial period of fiscal year 2006 through 2009 and fiscal year 2009 and 2010.

Independent auditors hired by the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC), Mayer Hoffman McCann P.C., had no findings for the triennial report stating that the Agency “is generally operating in an efficient and effective manner with no specific issues that are in need of improvement”.

For the fiscal year 2009/10 report auditors found that the Agency in all respects to financial position conformed to all accounting principles and had no internal deficiencies.

As for the triennial audit report, less than 1% of all transit agencies in the State of California achieve a “no findings” status. The partnership between the City’s Transit Agency and Transportation Concepts continues to provide dividends to the city’s ridership through high quality service, exemplary performance, and fiscal responsibility!